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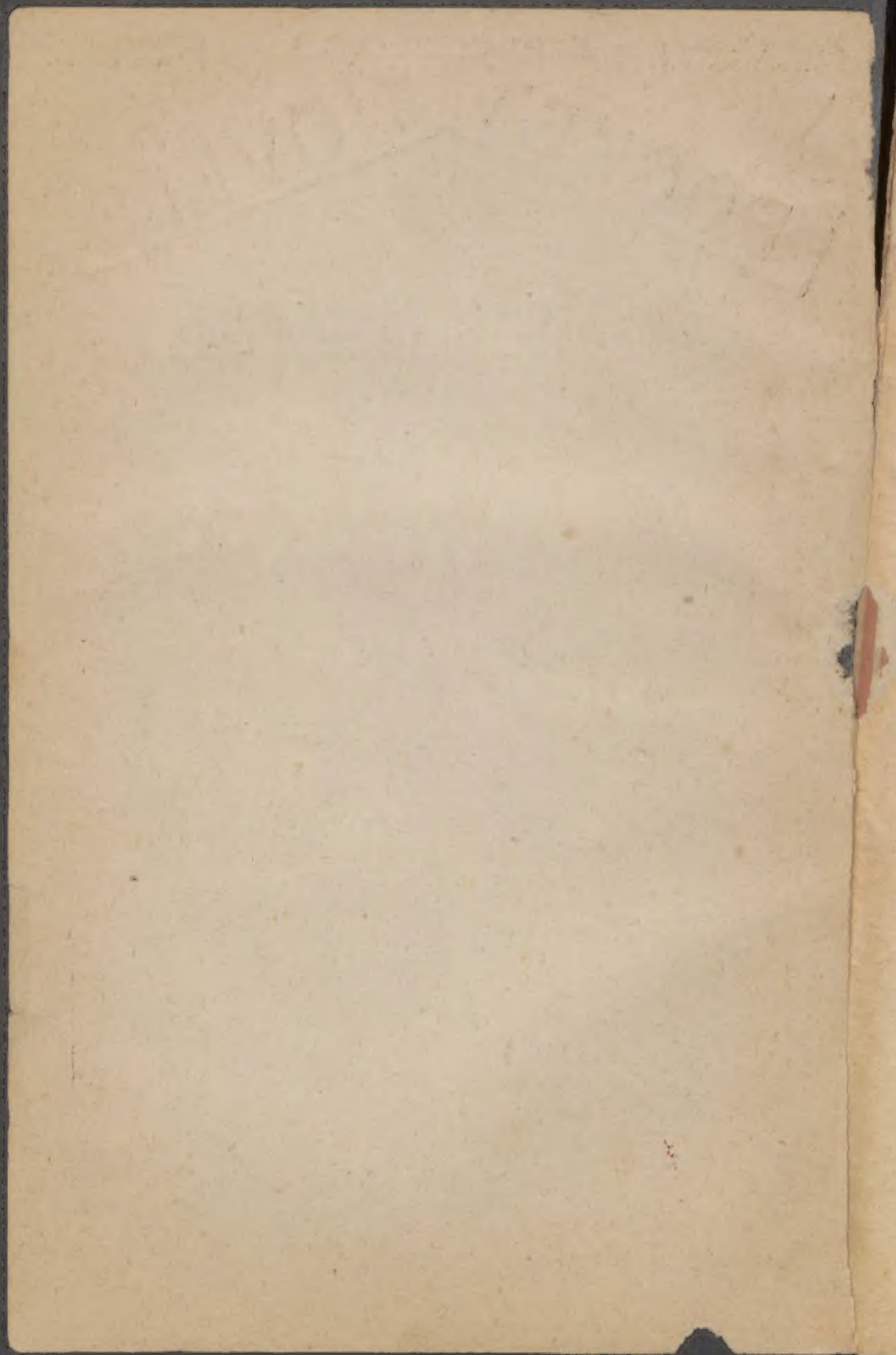
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POCKET NOVELS



The Masked Messenger.





THE MASKED MESSENGER:

OR,

THE MAID OF GPESHAM GRANGE.

BY HERRICK JOHNSTONE

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THE MESSENGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE TIME AND THE PEOPLE.

THE field of romance is a broad one. Meager, indeed, must be the record of a State which will not furnish subject-matter for the adventurous pen of fiction. It were presumption in any one to say that the choicer fountains of inspiration in this department of literature can be drained; that the master-efforts of Sue, Dumas, and George Sand, and of the others "whose names are fair upon the blazoned shield," have exhausted the records and traditions of the past. Truly, the fountain of the past is inexhaustible, since beauty, and love, and heroism can not perish. It is a brimming, never-lessening fountain, whence an enraptured world can drink forever. There is one fair tale of love and loyalty, of soldier-blows and love-sighs, which has, as yet, escaped the romancers of the past, and which, I trust, will not ungracefully appear within the ensuing pages.

The scene is laid in England, in the autumn of the year 1651—that eventful autumn in the eventful life of Charles Stuart, afterward known as the "Merry Monarch," when he stood at bay with fourteen thousand Scotchmen, and a few hundred hastily-gathered

cavaliers, before the iron-handed Cromwell, who, gathering the county militia as he pursued the prince, was bearing down from the Scottish border with overwhelming force, and a determination to exterminate, at one fell swoop, the Royalist cause forever. Misfortune had attended the house of Stuart for years. Defeated at Edgehill, at Reading, at Naseby, and on a hundred smaller fields, with the crowning, bloody disaster of Marston Moor—the elder Charles had closed the first act of the tragic drama by baring his proud neck to the headsman's stroke. But, undismayed, undaunted, came now the younger Stuart to claim his throne and strike for vengeance. Fearless and sanguine, full of the buoyancy of youth and health, with his faculties whetted by poverty and insult long endured, he looked with confidence upon the approaching shock of war, and had no forebodings of the still severer disaster which was to blight his cause and send him a hopeless, hunted fugitive from his native shore.

Among those who still clung with enthusiastic devotion to his falling fortunes, was a gentleman of Northumberland, of the name of Guy Carlington, the sole remaining scion of an illustrious family, whose lot had been cast with the king's from the very commencement of this turbulent period of civic dissensions in Britain. Guy's father had died bravely at the siege of Reading, cheering on his troop of horsemen to the charge; and the scythe of death had mown his elder brother, Garnett, from his steed at the carnage of Marston Moor; in which battle Guy himself was severely wounded, but survived for

further deeds. The surrender of Charles I into the hands of his enemies, had so far put an end to the contest, that young Carlington had sought and obtained security in his dreary manor-house of River-ton, as it was called, in the most hilly and uninhabited portion of Northumberland. But, if forgotten by his enemies, and suffered by them to live unmolested in this secluded spot, by the imprisoned monarch and his fugitive queen and her children the name of Carlington was forever coupled with gratitude and honor. And now, when the royal cause looked up again, the devoted cavalier did not hesitate to seize his brand anew and hasten to join the prince at Worcester, with such handful of loyal troopers as he could muster from among his old followers.

Another character, quite the antithesis of this chivalric one I have hastily described, must here be introduced. Robert Challoner was a king-hater by instinct, a bigoted Puritan by faith, and a gallant soldier withal. He was, also, a Northumbrian, and a neighbor of Carlington—Gresham Grange, his family seat, being scarcely twelve miles from River-ton manor. Sir David Challoner, Robert's father, also a devoted Roundhead, was on State service in Ireland most of the time, and Lady Challoner, his consort, was living at Paris—the aristocratic atmosphere of France being more congenial with her disposition than the sober, Puritan rule which had possessed her native Britain. A direct descendant of the king-loving house of Lindsey, her political inclination had led to an early estrangement from her

husband and son, and she would gladly have carried her daughter, Charlotte, with her into this voluntary exile, but that the daughter, though herself a Royalist, refused to be separated from her father and brother by such an interval of space, preferring to remain at the Grange, and trust to a brighter future. And as her brother's military duty kept him away from home, the lady Charlotte had a lonely time of it at the remote country place, with her few servants around her, and nothing but her tambour frame or her pet falcon for entertainment.

An idolizer of Cromwell, and an excellent soldier, and a shrewd thinker, Colonel Robert Challoner was a rising man; but unscrupulous, unprincipled, and with a temper so uncontrollably bad, that he was frequently his own enemy, through a whim of partisan malice or vengeance. Where heavy blows were to be dealt, a dangerous scheme to be consummated, he was a trusted man; and the great chiefs of his party had ample occupation for him in this province. But, if a discreet diplomacy were needed, if a Royalist was to be unmasked by intrigue and plotting, it was a piece of deviltry they allotted to cooler heads, less vindictive bosoms, than Robert Challoner, of Gresham Grange. To such a man, the loyal opinions of his pure sister, Charlotte, were necessarily the source of much uneasiness and chagrin; though to do him justice, he loved her tenderly, and would generally "eat his rage" in her presence; while she was too sensible to provoke him unnecessarily by an obtrusive expression of sentiments which, though dear to herself, were obnoxious to him. Nevertheless, in spite

of their mutual efforts, when Robert was at the Grange, stormy scenes would occasionally occur between them, and the irascible Roundhead would pace the floor like an imprisoned tiger, and drive his sister to the silence of the garret with his blasphemous denunciations of the Royalists, the Cavaliers, the "Malignants," as they were sometimes called; for he forgot his prayer-book and psalmody completely in these ebullitions, or only culled them for oaths.

But if there was one thing that served, more than others, to rouse the revengeful ire of Challoner, it was his sister's connection with her Royalist lover, the lonely lord of Riverton manor. He stormed, he menaced, he threatened to drag the Cavalier from his seclusion and have him hanged at London, if his sister did not renounce his acquaintance; but in vain. The proud woman would not disown her lover, and defied her brother's rage. Matters became so bad, however, and the colonel's rage so intense, that Charlotte at length forced herself to persuade Carlington to discontinue his visits while her brother or his followers were inmates of the Grange, and from the hard necessity, they mutually made this agreement between them. Threats and menaces had been bestowed in vain when they fell only upon herself; but she suffered herself to be conquered into temporary obedience when they were directed at him she loved.

Before the commencement of civil discord, no families had been on more fraternal terms than the Challoners and Carlingtons; and the affection which Charlotte and Guy entertained for each other was not of sudden growth. She had been a girl

sweetheart, and he a boy-lover. They had played together as children, while their respective sires were cosily drinking home-brewed together by the huge fireplace of Riverton manor, or inspecting the fat steers and blooded hunters of the Gresham stables. But the trouble fell upon the land; their friendship cooled; and the breach had slowly widened as the war-cloud darkened. The old men spoke of each other with bitterness, and a ferocious quarrel arose between Robert Challoner and Garnett Carlington, before mentioned, which culminated in a duel, in which the former was badly but not dangerously wounded. Then the feud between the two families seemed complete, with the exception of lady Challoner and her daughter, who failed to participate in the quarrel, on account of their Royalist tendencies, and the latter for an additional and tenderer reason.

CHAPTER II.

GRESHAM GRANGE.

"Bring me my golden spurs,
I must travel far to-day,
And the rowels shall rake my courser's side
Till red, be mixed with his gray."—OLD BALLAD.

MANY lights were twinkling from the windows of Gresham Grange as the soft September evening fell upon the drear Northumbrian hills. There was also an unusual bustle within, and lanterns were moving about the stables. Fully twenty steeds were tethered to the trees of the broad avenue which led up to the mansion, with a few surly troopers guarding them, and the jingling of armor, with now and then gruff voices, could be heard all through and around the house. For Colonel Challoner was preparing to join Cromwell at the south, and there was great hurry of preparation among his hastily-collected veterans.

The Grange itself was a fine old mansion, lordly in its dimensions, and elegant in its wide stretch of angles and prim gables. Noble were the grand old elms that lined the stately avenue, and half buried the mansion itself in a bosom of green foliage; and, from the upper bay-window of the northern wing, you can just see the dim white spire of Y—— cathedral, the nearest town.

Notwithstanding the bustle and confusion that surrounded her, Charlotte Challoner sat alone in the drawing-room window, gazing out upon the

darkening landscape, with something mournful and anxious in her gaze. The night is chill, and a brilliant fire is blazing on the hearth, which needs not the feeble aid of the brazen lantern that swings from the ceiling to make the room as bright as day. In truth, the flame is so cheerful, and the lady looks so lovely as its bright flicker leaps upon her dejected head, that we must take this opportunity to describe her.

She was beneath the medium size of women—very little, however; and there is that queenly stateliness of mien and robustness of outline, blended with her perfectly modest demeanor, which gives you a notion of greater height than the lady could rightfully claim. The head which reclines upon her hand is small and noble, festooned with a multitude of imprisoned ringlets of the deepest auburn; and the pale, clear face, which they partially conceal, is one of beauty. The fairness of its complexion is dazzling. A sweet, gently-retreating chin, lips of a tempting scarlet, and temples veined like Parian marble, fill in the pure oval of her face. And when the dark, deep, thoughtful eyes dawn like a blue and lustrous heaven from the perfect face, a feeling of adoration creeps into the heart, and you pray that she may speak, that music may be added to the charm. A rich robe of velvet, cut in the fashion of the time, with the neck and shoulders bare, and the snow-white arms dropped freely from the wide and pointed sleeves, invest her lovely figure; and, save the lucent necklace of pearl, a ring of wonderful brilliancy, which flashes from her right hand, is her only ornament.

She rose with a sigh and passed toward the back door, which led to another chamber, for jarring voices were heard from the hall outside, and she wished to escape them. But the door opened, and Colonel Challoner entered before she could make good her exit. Along with him entered a person who was a stranger to the lady.

"Charlotte, pray be acquainted with Captain Luther Ling," said her brother, introducing his companion. "Captain, my sister, the Lady Challoner."

The captain bowed obsequiously, and the lady, with a slight but courteous inclination of her head, completed the brief ceremony. She saw that her brother wished to be left alone with his guest, and, in a few moments, found a pretext to quit the chamber.

"You come direct from the General?" said Challoner.

"Direct," replied the other, who was a small man, well-favored, and of gentlemanly deportment, though dusty and disordered from a long ride.

"You say the 'Malignants' were at Worcester. How many?"

"Thirty thousand, report says."

"Report lies, then. It is impossible they should have twenty," said the colonel.

"General Cromwell gives them credit for fifteen," said the other. "We have twenty thousand—enough to crop their curls, and cure them of lying. I have given you the papers. Excuse me, I am faint. May I have some water? I—I—" The young man had grown deadly pale as he spoke, and

now reeled into a chair with an ejaculation of excessive pain.

Water was procured, and several soldiers crowded into the room; while Charlotte, who had heard the alarm, bent over the sufferer and bathed his brow, after his lips had tasted the refreshing element. The colonel stood by him with more curiosity than pity.

"Thanks, kind lady, I am better already," said the captain. "It's only a scratch I have received—a mere scratch."

"What, man! are you wounded?" cried Chaloner. "Hilton, call Dr. Gill. Why didn't you say you were hurt before, man?"

"Duty first, colonel."

"Where was it, and when?"

"Is it wise for you to question him in his present condition, brother?" said Charlotte's sweet voice; and the sufferer's dark eyes thereupon rested on her pitying face with a world of gratitude in their trembling gaze.

"I will give the colonel due information upon this most godless and sinful and impious and blasphemous affair," said a trooper of very remarkable appearance, who cast a "most sinful and godless" and black look at Dr. Gill, as the latter jostled him in his haste to get at the wounded man.

"Do so at once, sergeant," said the colonel, impatiently.

The sergeant was a man of about fifty years, tall, and gaunt as a skeleton, but evidently of prodigious muscular strength. He looked more like a preacher than a soldier, in spite of his breastplate and the long

blade girt so primly up to his waist. A greasy prayer-book was stuck in his belt between two immense pistols ; and an expression of such extravagant sanctimony invested his hypocritical visage, from the long and pointed beard to the bristling summit of his closely-shaven head, that it was not easy to behold him without smiling. This man, Sergeant Jeremiah Prim, as he called himself and was called, was a type, or rather, caricature, of a class of Puritans who were probably the most dangerous element which civilized society has ever formed. He was an utter hypocrite, treacherous, villainous, and brave ; most probably using his mask of excessive and ridiculous sanctimony, to disguise a disposition naturally devilish and insincere ; though he who would have been misled by the flimsy artifice, must have been a singular fool. Not in the least disconcerted by the colonel's testy command, the pious trooper took his own time and way for the recital.

“It happened about noon of this blessed and godly day, most worthy chieftain,” said he, “and scarcely a dozen miles from this sacred house, upon which may the righteous and discriminating Lord of Hosts, in his infinite mercy, pour down his blessings in a ceaseless shower, yea, like to the stream that tumbleth from the hills. As we rode along, such an awful spirit of joy entered into me, that I lifted up my voice in psalms of thanksgiving to the Most High, whose hand shall surely lead us to wade rejoicingly in the running blood of the Philistine Royalists, and whose agis of protection shall cover the bosoms of his devoted and time-serving—”

“There, there, my good fellow! to the subject, if you please, to the subject,” said the colonel, pettishly.

“As I was about to say, most worthy and God-fearing chieftain, when I had thus lifted up my sincere and holy thanksgiving to the throne of grace, the road led us down into a dark and lonesome dingle of the forest, like to the vague approaches to the pit where writhe and squirm the damned, forever, when a party of wretched, wine-guzzling, Sabbath-breaking, God-defying, blasphemous Cavaliers broke from the ambush of the wood, and charged us with drawn swords, and with such heaven-displeasing slogans as, ‘Down with the Roundheads!’ ‘Huzzah for the king!’ ‘A Charles! a Rupert! a Rupert!’ Hesitating not to seek the contact of battle with these blasphemous wretches, more especially in that they numbered not half so great as we, the children of the Lord, we met them with sturdy bullets as they came, and two of them were quickly launched in Tartarus, while several of our own brethren, however, were likewise stricken from their steeds by the Philistine hands. It was evident that they wanted our dispatches from the General, from the manner in which they endeavored to surround and carry off our valorous captain; but he struck so righteously and strong, and we were so numerous and timely in our might, that they were speedily driven to a shameful flight, like the evil spirits that abscond in the glance of the Lord God Jehovah, leaving two of their number slain, and one, a mad-cap scoffer at the Lord, alive and a prisoner in our hands. Thus, in the flush of their evil designs—”

"There, there! thank you, sergeant, you may—"

"Thus, in the flush of their malignant purposes, did the wicked melt before Jehovah's sword. Our righteous chieftain was sorely wounded, but disclaimed to quit his saddle till his mission was completed. And, though the foul ringleader of the attack escaped, his notoriety—"

"Ha! you recognized him?"

"Faith, I lost a finger by him at Marston Moor, and should not soon forget his evil face."

"Who was it?"

"The madcap Carlington, of Riverton manor."

Challoner sprung back with an oath, and stamped the floor in his rage.

"By Jove! he has knotted the noose for his own neck!" he exclaimed. "Lewis, bid Captain Waller to come here directly," he continued, addressing a man-at-arms, who left the chamber obediently.

"You say you have a prisoner?" he added, turning to Prim.

"Yea, verily, colonel, a most scoffing, villainous—"

"Bring him in!" And the sergeant also departed.

"You sent for me, colonel?" said an officer, entering.

"Yes. How many men can you mount in five minutes?"

"Thirty, or more."

"That is more than enough. Lose not a moment. You know Riverton manor?"

"Perfectly."

"Surround it, and seize the owner. If he resists, slay him like a wolf."

Charlotte had risen like a ghost at the mention of her lover's name. Pale as a very specter, she heard the cruel mandate delivered. Even now she could hear the clasp of spurs on the courtyard pavement, and the hurrying hoofs of steeds, preparing for the secret expedition. Her heart was cold with apprehension. She felt confused and unable to speak or act. Tramp, tramp, came the heavy footsteps of the approaching guard, and a merry, reckless voice half chanted and half caroled as it came :

“ At Marston Moor, by rebels four,
I found myself surrounded;
‘ Your horse !’ said one ; said another, ‘ your gun !’
‘ Here they are,’ said I, ‘ for I’m wounded !’
Tra la, tra la, tra la !
Charles Stuart is king of England.

“ But at Landsdown heath, when they rolled beneath
The flash of our swords with a shiver—
‘ Your sword !’ quoth his pride ; ‘ It is here !’ I cried ;
And I made a tight sheath of his liver !
Tra la, tra la, tra la !
Charles Stuart is king of England.”

The last stanza of this refrain was bawled into the very ears of the Roundhead colonel, as the singer was ushered into the room between two files of stern troopers, carbines in hand, with the hypocritical sergeant at their head, his holy visage working with disgust at the distasteful ditty, which he could not help hearing.

“ Hold thy blasphemous tongue, thou defamer of the just !” he growled at the prisoner, and then added, “ here is the reviler, most worthy colonel ; if it is thy wish that he should be hung at once, most gratefully will I perform—”

“ A rope well-knotted and tied, my lord,
Well-knotted behind the ear,
Then a glass of wine, and a leap from the board,
And I'm free! cries the wild Cavalier.
Tra la, tra la—”

“ Peace! peace! thou villain!” said Challoner.
“ What is thy name?”

“ Ralph Rackett, of Gawtrey Bridge.”

The speaker was an exceedingly well-favored young man, but emaciated with dissipation. The reckless, merry twinkle of his gray eyes bespoke the careless, loose spirit of his order. After the fashion of the Cavaliers, his hair was worn in heavy ringlets, and so long as to hang upon and below his shoulders. His doublet was of an expensive material and fashionable cut, but sadly disordered, with the lace cuffs reddened with wine-stains. His jovial spirit was undashed by misfortune, and he broke forth anew:

“ You ask my name, it is all the same,
Then call me a prince or the devil,
But whatever betide, when alone you ride—”

“ Peace!” roared the colonel. “ I know thee, fellow, for a devilish ‘ Malignant,’ and a disgrace to the shire. Who was the ringleader of your foray?”

“ A man.”

There was evidently a slim chance of “ pumping ” the prisoner to advantage, so Challoner turned aside to confer with Prim, and the Cavalier unceremoniously pushed aside his guards and stepped up closer to the bright fire, humming some fresh doggerel as he did so. While he stood there, looking at the red coals of the burning logs, there came a whisper, a whisper so low that it barely reached his own ear:

“Hist! Ralph!”

He looked up quickly but cautiously, and saw the Lady Charlotte standing near him. Could that whisper be hers? Yes, although she was not looking at him, although her pale lips did not move, the voice was hers, and it whispered again:

“Hist! Ralph! Do you know me?”

“Yes,” he replied, in a tone as low as hers.

“Do not look at me,” continued the whisperer, hurriedly; “keep your eyes fixed on the fire and listen. Thirty men are just starting to capture Carlington. He will be seized or slain if they find him. Is he at Riverton?”

“Yes.”

“Alas!”

The low sigh of suppressed agony went to the young man’s heart.

“Carlington must be apprised of his danger, lady,” he whispered. “Oh, if I were but free!” and he threw a quick under-glance around the chamber, as if searching for means of escape, but dropped his eyes hopelessly again.

“Is there no way to save him?” whispered Charlotte.

“One way—a friend, and a fleet horse.

“Alas! I have only the latter.”

“Have you no friend—not one, lady?”

“No. Yet stay!” He saw her fair forehead contract, and then a blush flew into her cheek, but was gone again in a second.

“Yes—I forgot; I have a friend, a feeble but true one!”

"Thank God!" said the Cavalier, with much fervor for such a madcap. "Lady, lose not a moment. Get your friend into the saddle. He can overtake the troopers if he rides with a will; and he can save a mile by taking the short cut by the Red Bridge."

But he glanced up to find that the lady had vanished. Then Sergeant Prim gave the order, and Ralph Rackett was remanded to his prison.

CHAPTER III.

THE FRIEND IN NEED.

"A steed! a steed! and a friend in need!
By our Lady, he crosses the ford!
He bears no pennon, he wears no plume,
Only his good broadsword."—SCOTTISH SONG.

The Cavalier might have shrugged his shoulders and given up Carlington for a doomed man, had he seen the lithe, boyish figure of him whom Charlotte Challoner had chosen for her lover's rescuer, as he glided from the dark rear-wall of Gresham Grange, across the moonlight, which now rested brightly upon the courtyard, and on to the deep forest behind the stables. Poor Charlotte! She must indeed be in want of friends, when she trusts this mission of peril in the keeping of a mere lad, such as this, her page, as he seems to be. And yet there is something so sprightly and precocious in the lad's appearance, as he hastily makes his way across the illuminated space, that one's confidence is momentarily augmented. He could not have numbered seventeen summers. A tight-fitting riding-suit of black velvet enveloped his slender form and graceful limbs, with a narrow scarf or sash at the waist, and a heavy felt Cavalier's hat almost entirely concealed his features with its slouching brim. He passed briskly but cautiously forward, and did not attempt to enter the stables, in which, if

he had succeeded in eluding the guards, he might have secured a choice of Challoner's excellent thorough-breds, but made for the forest. Just then the harsh voice of Sergeant Prim was heard at the head of the avenue in front of the mansion, and the young messenger quickened his pace as he heard the tramp of steeds preparing for the gallop. Next came the shrill order of the captain in command: "Trot out!" and the hurrying beat of hoofs apprised the page that the war-hounds had scented their prey, and were off for a long chase. His mistress had, doubtless, made him aware of the momentous nature of his errand, for the sound of the galloping troopers was a spur to his speed, and he fairly flew toward the thicket. Striking an exceedingly narrow pathway that led straight forward into its very depths, he hesitated not to plunge into the uncertain gloom, and sped down the pathway with the confidence of one well used to its windings.

"God help me! is the path interminable?" he gasped, when he had proceeded for several furlongs. "No—here is the dingle, at last!" he added, as he turned into a small opening in the forest, through which the moonlight poured in uninterrupted splendor.

A small cottage was located at the bottom of the glen, and the light of a torch, or hearth-fire, was glittering through its lattice. To this habitation the young man breathlessly hastened, and rapped sharply at the door with the butt of his loaded whip.

"Quick, Nanny, tell Larry to come out without a moment's delay!" he cried, to an old domestic who opened the door, and his face spoke more than his

words, he was so pale and wild. So Nanny turned, without a question, to do the bidding of the page; and, in a few seconds, the old groom came lumbering out with a portion of his half-considered evening crust in his hand.

“Come, Larry, saddle me Boreas, in a flash of lightning. It’s a life and death ride, all the way to Riverton!”

“To Riverton! a twelve-mile gallop so deep in the night!” exclaimed the old retainer, halting in his astonishment. “But really, hadn’t you better get some one else to go? The way is alive with freebooters. You will have—”

“No words! come on! come!” cried the page impatiently, seizing the groom by the arm and dragging him along the path they had taken. “There was no one to send but myself,” he added kindly, loth to wound the old man’s feelings. “I need only tell you that the object of my haste is to save the life of Guy Carlington, and you will pardon my seeming want of respect for your dear old self.”

“Guy! to save Guy’s life!” ejaculated the other. “God’s blood! Old as I am, I’d gallop from Land’s End to John O’Groat’s house myself, to save the noble Cavalier’s finger from a scratch!” and he pressed forward with all dispatch.

They had not far to go before their pathway had an end at a small and rude, but comfortable and substantial, rustic stable that was reared of logs among the concealing trees; and the sound of their footsteps on the leaves and brushwood roused a shrill whinny from within.

"Ah, he hears us! the old fellow is awake," cried the page, joyfully.

Larry opened the stable-door and brought out a saddle and other gear; he then entered once more and led out into the bright moonshine a wonderful steed.

"Boreas! dear Boreas!" cried the young man, leaping toward him, and caressing his noble head with genuine affection, while the courser arched his proud neck and whinnied again and again in a soft, human way, as if he had rejoined an old and beloved friend. The groom made all speed in investing him with the bright trappings.

Surely, never was there such another steed, nor one more calculated to raise affection as well as pride in the breast of his possessor. Milky-white—as pure as the drifted snow—it was a stallion of great size, with energy and speed in every quiver of his faultless frame, in every stamp of his nervous, sinewy limbs—and fire, pluck, unconquerable resolve, in every glitter of his big dark eyes; while the beautifully-shaped head, the iron bend of the massive neck, the enormous depth of chest, and the clean, small hoofs, bespoke him desert-born—an absolute and perfect Arab of the wastes. The skin was utterly white, but there was a bright, tawny tinge in the heavy-flowing mass of mane and tail, which made them glitter in the moonlight like drifted gold.

"In truth, he was a noble steed,
A Tartar, of the Ukraine breed,
Who looked as though the speed of thought
Were in his limbs; but he was wild—"

The saddle was on in a trice, the strong curb

forced into the unwilling jaws, and the martingales looped at the breast.

"Now, Larry, your hand!" cried the page; and, barely touching the old man's proffered hand with his foot, he vaulted airily on the towering steed, that neighed again and waited impatiently for the spur.

"Hold!" said the groom, respectfully, "one word, I pray you! Are you armed?"

The youth threw open his vest with a smile, and, for a single instant, the moonshine twinkled on the peeping butt of a pistol; then with a parting "God-speed," from the anxious servitor, the snowy courser bounded down the bridle-path, and horse and rider were soon lost in the forest beyond.

It would have been a wonderful and spectral sight to see them as they flew over the country. The forest-path was not brief, but it only required a few moments of the powerful strides of the mettled stallion to clear the trees, and leave the gloom in his rear. Then away, over the country, up hill and down, through shadow and moonlight, they sped along the grass-grown, seldom-used, by-road, till the little town of Allandale lay quiet and peaceful beneath them, as they gained the summit of the ridge that overbrows the village from the north. As they did so, the tones of the church-clock came floating up on the evening breeze with the stroke of nine, and, obedient to the rein, the swift courser halted in his tracks. But it was something more than the village church-bell that made the messenger pause.

Silencing, as best he could, the restless stamp of the curbed charger, he bent his head anxiously

forward, and listened intently. There was no mistaking the sound. Far away, beyond the streets of the sleeping town, he caught the clatter of many steeds, which grew fainter and fainter as he listened. The Roundheads were still a long way in front, and evidently pushing their steeds to the utmost.

"God, in thy mercy, lend me aid, or he is lost!" muttered the page, devoutly. "Now, Boreas, for the home-stretch!" and pressing his heels in the stallion's flank, they fled like a torrent down the steep toward the quiet river that flashed below them in the moonlight in the valley. There was a ford which would require caution and a consequent lessening of speed in crossing. It was a desperate chance to outride the troopers; but his road was a mile the shorter, his steed was the fleetest in Britain, and the trusting messenger gathered heart as he sped onward.

As he did so let us go before them all to the unsuspecting quietude of Riverton manor.

Larger and more castle-like than Gresham Grange, it was even more out of repair. The drawbridge of the moat was a stationary fixture now; the weeds were taller in the courtyard, and a greater antiquity could be reckoned on the giant bolls of the old oak-trees that shadowed the lawn. Beside this, the western wing was almost a hopeless ruin; the Gothic towers and chimneys thickly overgrown with ivy and other wild creepers. But the entire effect of the somber old mansion was inexpressibly beautiful and melancholy in the glimmer of the autumn moon, which drifted over its hoariness like a woman's hand laid softly on a wrinkled brow. And, scarcely a

bow-shot from the moat, the small river, or stream, that flows from the higher ranges of the Tyne, and thence to the sea, glittered like a silver sword between its blooming banks.

How different the manor from the bustle and noise of the Grange! But a single gleam, and that but a faint one, shone from all the gloomy pile. It was the student-lamp of the lonely lord of Riverton, who was toiling in his chamber upon manuscripts which he was desirous of completing before he once more—perhaps for the last time—left his hall for the partisan wars.

Melancholy and manly beauty were pathetically blended in the fine features of Guy Carlington. His complexion was naturally rather dark, but he was quite pale now from the severe course of study and introspection to which he had devoted the five years of physical inactivity and compulsory seclusion which the cessation of open hostilities had entailed upon him, or permitted him to enjoy, as the case might be. Most probably a species of pleasure, rather than of suffering, had been the burden of those five years. For he was a poet, in every sense of the word, and his habits, even as a lad, had taught him to love seclusion for its own silent sake. Perhaps he had, at one time, dreamed of other fame than that which waits upon the fickle fortune of the field. But his was too loyal, too passionate a breast to seek inglorious repose or selfish ends when the land was rocking with the tread of warring factions; and a father's and a brother's blood had reddened the Puritan spear.

Might there not have been another reason, more cogent, indeed, than his poems and books, which could serve to mitigate the dreariness of his seclusion? Gresham Grange was barely twelve miles away; and an hour's hard gallop brought him to the feet of one whose charms might well have roused the poet from his dreams—the hermit from his prayers.

The apartment was somewhat disordered, and sundry papers were scattered loosely over the table, upon which Carlington now thoughtfully propped his head with his arm. Elegance, but not splendor, was the characteristic of his attire—the Cavalier cut, and of faultless taste—while the broad lace collar and doublet cuffs were very white and clean. A much different “manner of man” was he from his madeap friend and merry follower, Ralph Rackett, of whom we have spoken. The long curls of his black hair were orderly, but not fastidiously arranged; and the delicate line of his dark moustache was the sole ornament of his sallow face. His form was full of power; well-knit, firm, and perhaps a trifle above the average height. But it was now as gentle and quiescent as the face; for Guy was buried in deep thought, and apparently, for the moment, unconscious of his surroundings. He had finished his toil, as a large roll of ribboned manuscript on the table bore witness, and now held loosely in his listless hand a single page of writing, which had probably had its influence in producing the reverie into which we find him plunged. Most likely it was one of his olden poems into which he had woven a cherished fancy of his beloved:

“ And, rising, from his bosom drew
Old letters breathing of her worth,
For ‘love,’ they said, ‘must needs be true
To what is loveliest on earth.’ ”

At length, by the very intensity of the thoughts which enthralled him, he seemed to escape from his reverie, and once more perused the page in his hand, with a quiver of emotion on his pale lips as he did so. He then folded and placed it hastily away. He also arose, gathered up the scattered papers, and deposited them in his secretary; after which he put on his hat and cloak, hooked his sword to his belt, and sauntered down in a meditative mood for a stroll on the lawn.

The breeze had died away and the foliage of the ancient trees was motionless in the moony night. The Cavalier had hardly crossed the moat, when something caught his ear which roused him from his meditation, and he listened eagerly, alert and active. The time was full of danger, and the slightest sound might be pregnant with meaning. He had heard the far-off hoof-beat of a coming steed. It grew louder and louder, then crunched the gravel of the opposite bank of the stream, and, an instant afterward, rung clatteringly on the stone bridge below the lawn. Guy's apprehension had considerably abated upon the discovery, by the sound of the hoofs, that they were but those of a single horse; but he nevertheless drew his sword and sprung boldly into the avenue to confront the stranger. Something like a feeling of awe gathered about his heart, however, as he beheld advancing toward him in the moonlight, with enormous strides, what appeared to be a spectral

steed with an elfin rider. But he shook off the unmanly feeling.

"Halt!" he cried sternly, with leveled blade, his left hand grasping a pistol in his belt.

The great white courser was instantly reined up by the hand of his shadowy rider, whose youthful appearance caused the Cavalier to return his weapon to its sheath, with a smile at his own apprehension. He now also recognized the steed, which had appeared so ghostly in the moonlight, to be none other than Charlotte Challoner's favorite white Arab, by whose side his own favorite charger had often curveted.

"Whom seek you, my lad?" asked the Cavalier.

"Guy Carlington, of Riverton manor," replied the youth, in a voice whose tones were as soft and clear as a girl's.

"I am he," said Carlington. "But let me warn you that I serve the king."

"There is no need of such warning, sir Cavalier," said the page, "as the nature of *my* warning will convince you, I fancy."

"Are you a messenger to me?"

"Verily!"

"From whom?"

"The mistress of Gresham Grange."

"What! Can it be? I was not aware she had a page. Is she well?—does she think of me? Oh, speak—speak! this long absence, which I have been compelled to keep, has eaten into my heart!"

"One question at a time, sir Cavalier," said the messenger, laughing. "And, as time is precious, I

must be brief. I *am* the page of the Lady Charlotte. She is well. She thinks of you often—very often. She has dispatched me on her own steed to give you a warning which may save your life. You are in imminent peril. Colonel Challoner has dispatched thirty troopers to seize you; and they started before I left the Grange. You can judge, yourself, of their proximity.”

“What is my crime?”

“You led the attack this morning on Cromwell’s messengers; Ralph Rackett was taken prisoner, and—”

“Ha! Rackett betrayed me?”

“Not he; but Sergeant Prim recognized you; and, if you remain here fifteen minutes longer, you are lost. Hark! even now they are upon you!” And they both could hear the rumble of the coming troopers, which gathered louder as they listened.

“You are right,” said Carlington; “there is no time to lose.”

He drew a small whistle from his bosom, and blew a shrill note.

“Hist! Will! Will!” he cried.

The whistle had scarcely died away, before a young man glided around the ruined wing of the manor, leaped into and out of the shallow, dry moat, in a trice, and stood at his master’s elbow.

“Saddle black Berry, and bring him here in a moment. Harry! it’s life and death!” was the only order; and the spry groom vanished as swiftly as he came.

The rider of the white stallion wheeled his steed to depart.

"Farewell!" he cried; but hesitated in his saddle, and continued: "My mistress also bade me say, that, if you thought it not imprudent, she could bid you good-by to-night, in the little glen behind the Grange."

"What time?"

"Midnight."

For the first time a suspicion—not of the lady, but of the messenger—flashed over Carlington's brain. He was as quick in deed as in thought, and now sprung forward and grasped the rider's rein.

"Much as I should be enraptured and honored at being permitted to make this secret visit, my slender page, I must say that I now mistrust you. This might be a lure—a trap of the Puritans. Your messages are strange and inconsistent. First, I am to fly from a coming foe. In the next breath, forsooth, I am to approach the Roundhead nest itself!"

"Alas! I see that my tale must sound strangely. What can I do to convince you of my truth?" sighed the page, in a sad voice.

"Did the lady give you no pledge—no token?"

"Alas, no! Yet stay—look! You should know this, if you love her as you say you do?"

He held up his hand, and a diamond ring of marvelous brilliancy flashed in the moonshine. The Cavalier bent low and kissed the ring devoutly.

"It is enough," he said. "Forgive my suspicion I shall fly to meet the lady at the little glen, and love will speed me to the appointed hour."

The small white hand trembled as the Cavalier touched the jewel once more with his lips; then,

wheeling the milk-white Boreas, he touched his flank with his roweled heel, and they vanished in the gloom.

The trees had hardly hidden the fleeing horseman when Carlington's groom led up his own charger—a black hunter, full of spirit and power. He made haste to mount, for the hoofbeats of the coming Roundheads sounded close at hand; in a few moments they would be at the manor gate.

“I am pursued, Will. Make haste and lead all the horses from their stalls to the deep thicket beyond. If questioned, pretend utter ignorance of my whereabouts.”

This was the Cavalier's only injunction to his groom, who touched his cap, in his respectful, silent way, and again started for the stables. Guy struck spurs to his steed and rode away at a brisk pace—going up the stream instead of down, for he dared not seek the bridge.

In a few minutes the squadron of troopers came thundering over the stream, and surrounded the mansion.

“Keep your eyes skinned, everywhere!” bawled the commander; “there may be secret passages. Knock at the gate, Sergeant Prim.”

Leaping from his horse, the parson-soldier went over the moat, and thumped loudly at the gate with his whip. For some time there was no answer; but presently the querulous voice of an old woman inquired the object of their summons, and was compelled to open the gate. A dozen men, with Prim at their head, immediately rushed in and ransacked the building.

"He has slipped through our fingers," cried one of them, returning from the search.

"Yea, verily," said Sergeant Prim; "the arch-fiend hath befriended his chosen child, and the servants of the Lord are defrauded of their prey. But lo! what have we here?"

The last remark was occasioned by the appearance of two troopers, with Carlington's groom as a prisoner.

"What is thy name, thou follower of the fiend?" continued the sergeant.

"Will o' the Wisp."

"A right devilish name. Where is thy master?"

"In his doublet, I hope."

"Sirrah! dost thou dare to bandy words with me?" cried Prim, in a rage. "I will teach thee that the doers of God's bidding are not to be despised."

"Stand off, thou canting hypocrite!" said the young fellow, firmly, as the other approached him menacingly. "Thou wilt have it? Well, then, take it!" and he struck the sergeant a tremendous blow between the eyes with his fist, which laid him on his back—his sword and breastplate rattling like a tin-kettle as he went down.

"Seize that man! seize him!" cried the captain; while a dozen soldiers rushed forward to avenge the sergeant's fall.

But they were now in front of a ruined portion of the manor; and, as they came toward him, the young man sprung back and vanished among the pillars which composed the ruin; nor were the most persistent efforts to retake him availing.

Maddened by the blow he had received, Prim begged the captain to fire the building, which the latter, however, sternly refused to do. Not a word of information could be extorted from the old woman; and, after an hour of fruitless search, the soldiers grumblingly set out on their return to the Grange.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAYSIDE INN.

DUKE. Who keeps this tavern, sirrah?

GROOM. A thief, my lord.

DUKE. Tell me his name?

GROOM. He hath none, noble duke. The waiters are pick-pockets, the hostlers highwaymen, and all the—

DUKE. No matter. I will enter.—OLD PLAY.

A STRANGELY uncomfortable, rickety, tumble-down, dingy, out-of-the-way, unhospitable-looking place was the Blue Dragon Inn, situated in a remote, lonesome corner of the shire, on the now almost untraveled by-road which ran from Riverton to Gresham Grange, and about three miles from the latter place. Indeed, so miserable was the lonely inn, and so surly and extortionate the proprietor, Peter Bunce, that some of the Puritan officers, who had made it their head-quarters for lack of room at the Grange, had found the desolateness unbearable, and beaten a hasty retreat to the farm-houses in the vicinity. On the very verge of the forest, it was also an object of suspicion to the passing traveler, and quite suggestive of being a convenient rendezvous for thieves and freebooters. But, upon the night in which our story is still immersed, the Blue Dragon had a more convivial appearance than usual. Guy Carlington was galloping toward it, when the sounds of revelry reached his ear—ribald songs and boisterous mirth—

and he saw the window of the tap-room brilliantly illuminated.

"The devil choke them!" he muttered; "they will bring the whole rebel crew upon our heads with their drunkenness and folly."

"Pass the wine, brave boys, the wine;

Away with melancholy!

Here's Peggy, Nelly, Eveline,

Sweet Meg and tender Molly!

Then huzza! huzza! huzza!

We'll drown the world in folly!"

Some such a catch as this, half unintelligible for the oaths and yells that interlarded it, and followed by a jingling of cans and still more uproarious mirth, came out to the approaching Cavalier.

"Rackett must have made his escape," he muttered. "That song was his, if I mistake not."

He leaped from his steed and entered the inn.

"Shame, gentlemen, shame!" he said, reprovingly. "Is this a time for such unseemly mirth? Would you bring the Commonwealth about your ears?"

The bar-room of the tavern was occupied by upward of a dozen Cavaliers, who were eating and drinking, and the host himself, a large, burly fellow, half-poacher, half-highwayman, with a red nightcap on his head, was endeavoring to quiet the disturbance, with the assistance of his pretty daughter, but evidently with little effect. But the entrance of their leader had shamed some of the tipsy Cavaliers into silence, and Ralph Rackett staggered up to him in an explanatory way.

"It's an (hic) morn, Carlington. They're only (hic) celebrating my return (hic) from captivity, you know (hic.)"

"Home from prison among the Jews—

Tra la, tra la, tra li oh!

A dead man now would have stood in my shoes

If I hadn't—"

"Is thy skull utterly vacant, thou brawling drunkard?" interrupted Carlington, sternly. "Speak sense, if thou hast it. How didst thou escape?"

"By the help of my lady's page," replied Ralph, endeavoring to look serious. "Not an hour ago, the little monkey threw something into the infernal dungeon where they had me locked, and that something proved to be a key, wherewith I opened the door, helped myself to the best horse in the Gresham stables, and here I be—

"Ready for this or that, my lad,

With sword or pistol, gun or spear;

A footpad or a smuggler, friend,

But always a Cavalier!

A treader of air, or a devil-may-care,

But always a Cavalier!"

"Did you get any information at the Grange?"

"Yes. The king has probably come to bay at Worcester, and Cromwell will attack him some time during the present week."

"We must be there—we must be there!" muttered Carlington, pacing the floor thoughtfully. "What is the hour?"

"Twenty minutes to midnight," said the host, turning to the hour-glass.

The Cavalier prepared to proceed to the little glen.

"I shall be back before morning, Rackett," said he, "and by noon we must be on the war-path. Peter, for the sake of the king, endeavor to keep them

quiet till I return," he added, addressing the innkeeper, and then departed.

The thicket in which the Lady Charlotte was to meet her lover was scarcely a bow-shot from the rear wall of the Grange, but so very dense and deep that its seclusion was almost perfect. But it was quite small—a mere clump of oaks—with a narrow place cleared in the center, wherein a bower had been overrun with clematis and wild woodbine for many a bright summer; and a rustic bench encircled the giant trunk of an oak a few paces from the arbor. Upon this rustic seat the heavily-cloaked figure of a woman was seated in the moonlight, which still drifted through the branches above. It was the figure of Charlotte Challoner. Although she well remembered the hour she had herself appointed, her love and her anxiety for her lover's safety had weighed so heavily upon her heart, that, long before the time, she had seated herself in the thicket to await his coming. She had started at every sound in hope that it was his footstep, and now her anxiety became distressing, as she knew that the appointed time was close at hand. Once, indeed, a heavy step approached. She shrunk into the deep recess of the leafy arbor to see the gaunt figure of Sergeant Prim stalk along the path in a meditative mood, and humming a surly hymn. But he had passed without suspecting the lady's presence, and she had again been left alone—alone with the doubts and misgivings of her own sad heart. She did not fear that Carlington would deem her midnight tryst with him unmaidenly or unseemly. She knew

him too well for that—she felt that he knew *her* too well to be otherwise than gladdened at the daring strength of her pure affection for him. But oh! what a load of anxiety now pressed upon her breast. Why did he not come? He might have been way-laid—wounded. She shuddered at the thought, and glanced around despairingly. Something rustled along the path. She listened eagerly. It was a footstep—a step whose manly stride she could not mistake.

“There glides a step through the foliage thick,
And her cheek grows pale—and her heart beats quick.
There whispers a voice through the rustling leaves,
And her blush returns, and her bosom heaves:
A moment more—and they shall meet—
’Tis past—her lover’s at her feet!”

It was indeed so.

“Charlotte, my own Charlotte!” exclaimed the Cavalier, springing toward her.

“Guy, dear Guy!” and the maiden sunk upon his breast, with a sigh of relief and joy. “Oh, how I have suffered with anxious waiting! How long you have been!” she continued, looking up from his strong caress into his happy face.

“It is the precise hour to a moment. I could come no sooner, dearest!” he murmured, in reply, at the same time pressing his trembling lips to her swinning eyes and pouting mouth. “I grieve that you have been pained with waiting. Forgive me!”

“Nay, I did not mean to chide. Whatsoever I suffered, I am the happier for it now. Oh, I am so happy—so happy!” she repeated, her exquisite accents

mellowed by emotion, and her head again drooping fondly on his breast.

He sat down with her on the rustic seat, still pressing her closer to him, and for a while the united lovers were silent. For there are some brief moments in the history of the human heart—some holy, rapturous moments, when the eloquence of the feelings is too deep, too divine, for aught of expression beyond the religious silence of absolute bliss. And some such moments now sped on their noiseless pinions through the little glen. Guy looked upon the fair bright head that was pillowed on his bosom with a joyous speechlessness, and his eyes were not devoid of tears. And she—her eyes were closed, but she felt that bosom heave against her own, and a dreamful languor, born of rapture, crept about her heart and stilled its wild pulsations. At length she looked up.

“You are well?” she said. “You are safe and well?”

“Oh, yes!” he murmured. “And you? Is my darling well?”

She put up her pretty lips for an answer.

“And if I am safe, it was you that saved me,” he continued. “To you and your courageous page do I owe my safety—perhaps my life. God bless you both. Who is this page, my love? I would know him better, and thank him more fully than I was permitted to do.”

Charlotte hesitated in her reply.

“It is a desire of my page,” she said, “that his name should be kept a secret, at present, from all

save myself; and I have granted his wish. Trust him, however, my love, and he may be of future service in this troublous time. Rode he not white Boreas bravely?"

"Right gallantly!" replied the Cavalier. "I' faith, he seemed a spirit of the clouds upon the giant steed! But tell me, love, how goes it with your Roundhead lodgers?"

"I am soon to be rid of them all, I hope. Their horses are almost destroyed with their late gallops over the northern hills, and I believe their masters will remain until the day after to-morrow. Upon that day my brother intends to start southward, picking up all the little garrisons on his way, when he will probably reach General Cromwell, with considerable reënforcements, in time for the great attack against the king. Guy—you will not go? You will not join the king this time? Pray tell me that you will not!"

"I can not tell you so, my sweet. For I must join the king," said Carlington, in a sad, but steady voice.

"Oh, if I should lose you, Guy—if you should be slain!" she faltered, turning pale. "Remain, Guy. Your single arm can avail little."

"Lady," said the Cavalier, rising, and drawing up his manly person to its full hight, "your counsel is such I little love to hear, even though it fall from your own peerless lips. In times like these, a single arm may turn the battle's reddest tide; and, even if it were of little moment, could my honor survive, if I should forsake my king? Could you love a craven, Charlotte?"

Love and pride were contending in her breast. She hung her head but made no audible response.

"A rusty blade hath a poor excuse in these days," he continued. "Bid me to the battle, Charlotte, if you truly love me—if you love the king. Bid me go forth, not stay."

Her hesitation was over; and she fell upon his breast with tremulous sobs.

"You are right, Guy! Go," she cried, through her fast-falling tears. "Go forth, and God will defend you, I know. You will forgive my weakness, darling, but I am so miserly of your image—I so hoard you in my heart!"

"Forgive you! forgive you!" he murmured fondly, his warm breath wandering through her hair. "Nay, forgive me for my harshness, my sweet angel. Believe me, I shall battle braver for your God-speed to the field. And soon—ah! soon—"

"Hush! quick! quick! you are in peril!" She had placed her hand on his lips, and, seizing his arm, pulled him deep into the dense wood, for steps were heard approaching.

The concealment was not effected a moment too soon, for the next instant Sergeant Prim, with four soldiers at his heels, came into the opening, cautiously and pryingly picking his way along the narrow path. Carlington considered himself as good as captured, when, a few seconds later, another soldier appeared, leading his own black Berry by the bridle.

"They have found your horse in the thicket, and are now upon your track," whispered Charlotte, with quivering lips.

"Hush! and do not fear," whispered Carlington.

The Roundheads explored the arbor with drawn swords, and peered into the thicket around them with searching eyes.

"He must be further on," said Prim, in a low voice.

"Are you sure he's in the thicket, sergeant?" asked one of the men.

"Sure, ninny! Heardst thou not voices a moment ago? and have we not his steed? Rest assured we have the blasphemer in the toils. Forward now, and softly!"

One after another they vanished down the dark path that continued its penetrating way into the thicket.

"You must have another horse," said Charlotte, calm and resolute now, as the danger was so close at hand. "You shall have Boreas."

"How brave you are, my noble girl!" said Carlington. "You are worthy to be a monarch's bride. Well, if I must rob you of the stallion for a little while, so be it. I know his stable well, and will immediately go for him."

"No—it would be madness!" she exclaimed. "Without a doubt, the wood is surrounded. *I* alone must go for the stallion."

"Impossible, Charlotte! I will not hear of it. Hist—I have it!" said he. "Send the page."

She hesitated.

"You speak wisely," at length she said. "I will go for him this instant."

She started away, but his soft touch detained her

"A moment!" he whispered, with tremor in his tones. "This is our last meeting. We may—never—meet—again!"

She sprung into his arms. Their lips met in a clinging kiss.

"A long, long kiss, a kiss of youth, and love,
And beauty, all concentrating like rays
Into one focus, kindled from above;
Such kisses as belong to early days,
Where heart, and soul, and sense in concert move,
And the blood's lava, and the pulse a blaze,
Each kiss a heart-quake."

"Farewell!"

"Farewell!"

And they tore away from each other.

Pale with the "heart-quake," Charlotte trusted herself not to throw a glance behind, but made all haste toward the Grange; while Carlington crept to the edge of the thicket, whence he could see the house, now hushed and lightless except by the moon, and watched her fleeting form. If there were sentinels posted around the wood, she escaped them, and, in a few moments, entered the Grange. The door by which she entered was one by the side, and gave admittance to no portion of the Grange but the apartments occupied by the lady. It was, therefore, with mingled emotions that the Cavalier witnessed the page issue from this very door a few minutes after the lady's entrance. Why was it necessary that the handsome boy should be in Charlotte's private rooms? A sudden jealous pang darted to Carlington's heart. With a strange misgiving he recollected that Charlotte had declined to speak of this page's history or name. Stifling these unworthy

thoughts with some difficulty, he watched the youth until he reached the path which led to old Larry's cottage, when he was rapidly lost in the forest.

Some time elapsed, when, wearying of waiting for the page, and not apprehending danger, the Cavalier retraced his steps toward the arbor. But scarcely had he shown himself in the moonlighted opening, when Prim and his followers sprung upon him from their ambush.

"Ha!" exclaimed Carlington, drawing his sword. "Come on, dastards! vermin!"

"Seize the reviler! Slay him, if he resists!" bawled the sergeant, dancing around to get in a stroke.

The foremost trooper rolled to the dust, the strong blade of the Cavalier piercing his breastplate like a pumpkin-rind, and the vigorous back-hand motion of the sword-hilt, as the blade was wrenched from the wound, caught the psalm-singing sergeant in the jaw with a momentum that sent him reeling back a dozen paces, leaving Guy to play upon the next and nearest opposing blade. But the attacking party were six in all, and the remainder closed upon him with desperate thrusts. To add to these overwhelming odds, an unlucky twig caught the Cavalier's foot, which brought him stumbling to his knees.

"Die, wretch! Die, reviler!" exclaimed the infuriated sergeant, springing at his throat.

But there was suddenly a great tramping through the narrow path, and the towering white stallion, with his black-clad rider, burst into the opening like an avenging specter. Seized with a superstitious

terror, the men-at-arms flung down their weapons and fled in dismay; while the short hair of the Roundhead sergeant fairly lifted his skull-cap with excess of fear.

"The Pale Steed and his demon rider!" he exclaimed, lifting his hands to heaven, and following his comrades with the speed of the guilty pursued.

Carlington laughed heartily at this sudden change of fortune.

"Are you wounded?" asked the page.

"Not a scratch," was the reply. "But you were in the nick of time to save me. Another instant, and that canting vagabond would have cut my throat. What! Berry, my boy, I have thee once more!" he exclaimed, turning to his recaptured charger, which the Roundheads had abandoned in their flight.

"This is excellent fortune," said the page. "But my services are no longer needed. You are out of danger. Farewell!"

"Stay!" cried Carlington; but the white steed plunged into the narrow bridle-path again, and the page was swiftly borne from his view.

"Deuce take it!" grumbled the Cavalier; "must I be twice saved from death without thanking my preserver, or even seeing his face distinctly?"

But there was no help for it now; so he mounted black Berry, and took the opposite path, leaving nothing behind but some scattered weapons and a dead Roundhead.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLUE DRAGON AGAIN.

**Yea, yea! if he be weak, a cripple, starved
And small, advance upon him bravely; rush
Upon him, spit him, spit him like a frog.
But look you, master, if he come right blithesome,
Gay, equal-weaponed, show him your back, man,
Mount Shank's mare—play with your heels; there's naught
So wholesome, skin-preserving, sweet. THE FOOL'S ADVICE.**

It was not far from daybreak, as the tired lord of Riverton once more approached the crazy portals of the Blue Dragon Inn. The house was quiet now. The hostler would very probably take care not to hear him if he called, so he turned groom for himself and gave his horse the best food and shelter which the wretched tavern-stable afforded. Then, pushing into the tap-room, on the floor of which Rackett and his boon companions were sleeping off their heavy potations at a very laborious and not very musical rate, he threw himself on a bench, and was soon fast asleep.

It was not early morning when the tavern was awake. In fact, its host would have slumbered a good hour longer had it not been for a sturdy thumping at the tap-room door by a traveling notary, who demanded admittance and a hearty breakfast after his long ride. The landlord admitted him with a sleepy yawn, and proceeded to wake up the scattered

forms of the slumbering Cavaliers, who, one by one, arose, not a whit the clearer headed for their night's carouse, but with appetites whetted for drink and food.

"The foul fiend seize thee, thou intruding vagabond!" growled Ralph Rackett, stretching himself, and propping his giddy head on his elbow, at the same time eyeing the stranger with much distrust. "Thou art a Roundhead; speak, what dost thou here?"

The traveler certainly was of suspicious personal appearance. His lean, tall figure was invested with a suit of rusty brown, closely fitting, and of the plainest Puritan cut. His high peaked hat slouched so low upon his ears as to give him the appearance of having no hair at all—so closely was his bullet-head shaven; a pair of enormous green goggles concealed his eyes, which must have been too villainous to disclose. Added to this, a broad strip of black court-plaster almost covered one side of his jaw, disfiguring him in a painful manner. An appearance of extreme trepidation pervaded his demeanor, which might have been either real or affected; and he made no answer to Rackett's rude questioning.

"If thou wilt not speak, thou shalt drink with me!" cried the latter, staggering to his feet. "Gin! Peter, gin! Come, lads, let's make the Roundhead drunk!"

The unhappy Puritan threw up his hands with a holy horror at this proposition, but the rioters surrounded him with laughter and cheers, and forced him to the counter.

"The Lord deliver me from the Philistines!" groaned the notary, in a feigned voice. "I protest, gentlemen, against this sacrilege! I dare not touch the seductive beverage. It is the devil's wine."

"Ha! ha! Push him the bottle, Molly!" laughed Harry Merton, only second to Ralph himself in deviltry. "These Roundhead priests are as pious as hyenas in public, while they drink their heads off behind the screen."

"Yes, he shall drink, or be soused in the horse-pond!" cried another.

"But I protest! gentlemen, I protest against this unrighteous—"

"Ply him! ply him well!" bawled Rackett.

"The Roundheads love to revel,
Behind the screen, at least;
The stranger is the devil,
And the devil is a priest."

But Carlington, who had sat apart enjoying the joke thus far, now came forward.

"Nay! nay!" he said; "the gentleman shall not drink against his desire. Release him, friends. In lieu of the liquor, I move that he pray for us," he continued, compassionating the notary, yet not wishing to deprive the Cavaliers of their merriment altogether.

"Good! good! the best joke of the season!" cried the merry crew.

"David seized his harp and swept
Jehovah's praise, but could not play
For gazing at the Hebrew maid
Who showed her ankles o'er the way,"

Chanted the incorrigible Rackett, imitating the nasal twang of the dissenters' choirs.

But the Roundhead was far less averse to praying than to drinking. Indeed, he complied with readiness and energy, praying in the stentorian tones and extravagant rhetoric of his order, and not neglecting to have his revenge upon his tormentors by interlarding his sermon with the most violent abuse of king Charles, and the most exuberant eulogy of the Roundhead chieftains, from General Cromwell to Praise-God-Barebones; so that they were well content to leave him in peace when he had finished his discourse.

Pretty Molly soon covered the board with a better repast than the appearance of the tavern would have led one to expect; and, after hastily devouring his portion, the Roundhead notary paid the landlord an extortionate price without grumbling, mounted his horse—a sorry, bony cob of unreckoned antiquity—and pursued his way through the forest, unmolested.

Carlington had writing to do, and messengers to dispatch to different points, where the Cavaliers were mustering through the country, which occupied another hour. Rackett and his confrères sauntered out on the green in front of the inn and annihilated the time with the dice-box or fencing-foils. Guy had no plan of operation which he could put in practice till he received farther advices from the country round, so, having finished his writing and dispatched his messages, he also sauntered out upon the lawn.

The noisy crew were gathered about the dice-board, and Rackett and Merton were wrangling loudly over the game. Guy turned away from them with a sick, lonesome feeling about his heart. While he could not but despise the reckless, dissipated

manners of his followers, he was too philosophical not to discover in the times, the conflicts, and the atmosphere of contention in which they lived, the cause of their immorality; and he could not but pity while he despised. An exclamation from one of the gamblers caused him to turn quickly.

“God’s blood! what have we here?”

“The Lady Charlotte’s white stallion, by all that’s holy!” exclaimed Rackett. “And how well that little devil sits him.”

In another instant the fleet steed halted before the group.

“You shall not escape my gratitude this time, at least!” cried Guy, running up and catching the youth by the hand.

He could now see under the slouch hat plainly, too. A face of exquisite beauty had the page. His cheek had the softness and bloom of a woman’s, the eyes were large, lustrous and silken fringed, and there was no telling how the jet-black moustache grew so luxuriantly from his short, curling lip. He blushed like a girl beneath the scrutinizing gaze of the Cavalier, and received the thanks which were showered upon him passively and uneasily.

“What is the occasion of *this* visit, my friend?” said Guy.

“More danger,” replied the youth. “There are but a few moments to spare,” he continued, hurriedly. “A traveler stopped at the inn, this morning, did he not?”

“Yes; a poor devil of a notary, who—”

“He was no notary.”

“What then?”

“Sergeant Prim, in disguise!”

“The devil!”

Astonishment was depicted on the faces of the Royalists. Ralph Rackett fairly danced upon the sward with rage and mortification.

“The infernal, lying, pop-eyed, psalm-singing hypocrite! The crop-eared, brown-legged, devil-serving—”

“For heaven’s sake, gentlemen, do not loiter! The spy was sent by Colonel Challoner, and the whole gang—nearly fifty—led by the colonel himself, are barely five minutes behind me. Farewell!” And, with this parting injunction, the messenger wheeled his steed, and plunged into an obscure bridle-path, and vanished.

“Let us appropriate one of our five minutes’ grace to deliberation, gentlemen,” said Carlington, calmly. “There are two modes to pursue. The one is to barricade the inn and trust to our carbines; the other is to get to horse. What is your vote?”

“The saddle! the saddle! Let us fight on horse-back!” cried the Cavaliers in concert.

“That is my choice, also,” said the captain. “Away! Lose not an instant.”

A few moments of confusion and bustle, and the Cavaliers—eighteen in all—were in the saddle.

Carlington’s clear voice rung out sharply:

“Form in line—forward! Trot out!” and away they went down the road at a break-neck canter.

But the pursuers were so close upon them that they caught a glimpse of the flying band before it

could turn the angle of the hilly road. A fierce shout arose from the rebel troopers, and they pressed forward like an avalanche.

"How many do you make of them, Rackett?" said Carlington, to his lieutenant.

"Fully fifty," replied the latter, turning in his saddle as he rode, and looking back.

"Can we keep them at this distance for a mile?"

"Yes; I have it—you intend to make a stand at Deep Dingle?"

"Yes; if we reach it."

"Huzzah!" shouted the madcap. "We're to meet them, lads!"

"Sword's point! sword's point! one and all!
Firm in the saddle, lads! wait the call!
Think of your sweethearts fondly!
Slash, slash! one—two—three!
Our hearts may bleed, but our souls are free—
Give it the rascals soundly!"

A gallant cheer saluted the stirring ditty, and the Cavaliers spurred deeper for the promised goal.

Deep Dingle, as it was called, was a heavy-wooded ravine between the hills, well calculated for defense in a case like this, where horsemen were combatants; and the interval—say a quarter of a mile—was pretty well preserved between pursuers and pursued when the latter reached the dingle, and made a sudden halt.

"Quick, Merton!" cried the captain; "dismount, with six men, and fill the road with brushwood and rails."

Prompt to the command, the officer and his assistants leaped from their steeds, and, in a moment,

had piled a formidable breastwork across the narrow road.

“Remount! be lively!” was the command. “Sink deep into the thicket—look to your flints—and wait the word! But let no man fire at Colonel Challoner, on his life.”

A yell of rage burst from the foremost of the Roundheads, as they beheld their path obstructed.

“Its nothing but brush—you can ride through it—forward!” shouted the passionate voice of Challoner.

“Forward, children of the Lord!” echoed the stentorian tones of Sergeant Prim, and, himself in the advance, the front of the column dashed against the brush. But the breastwork only lacerated the horses’ legs and would not give way. And here the very numbers of the Roundheads proved a disadvantage to them. For the rear men-at-arms came crowding down upon their companions, who were huddled before the obstruction, confusion ensued, and, in a few seconds, the steep, narrow path of the dingle was jammed to suffocation with a struggling mass of frightened steeds, and struggling, swearing troopers.

“Look to your flints! Steady, lads!” rung out the clear voice of Carlington above the din. “Steady—*fire!*”

The effect was tremendous. A simultaneous volley leaped from the covert of the eighteen Cavaliers. So close were the quarters, so solid the rebel ranks, that hardly a bullet was wasted. Seven or eight soldiers rolled from their beasts, Prim had a ball

in his left arm, and there was nothing but confusion worse confounded in the Rebel ranks. A few random shots were fired at the Cavaliers, but without effect. The few who could escape from the entangling mass, were galloping out of the dingle, as best they might, in a panic of fear.

“Load again! Look to your flints! Steady, men, steady!” shouted that ringing voice again. “Steady, now—*fire!*”

Again the dingle echoed to the rolling report, and the death-dealing volley was poured into the struggling, shrieking mass, with the same terrible effect.

“Back—back, for your lives!” cried Challoner, almost beside himself with rage and mortification. “Back, or you’ll all be slaughtered like calves!”

Seconded by his officers and the brave Prim, he made superhuman efforts to bring order from the chaotic mass; but in vain. A panic had seized them. Frantic terror or stolid stupefaction made them an easy prey. Once more the mortal fire of the carlines scattered death through the Rebel ranks, if ranks they could now be called, when the order was given for a charge. Leaping from their saddles, a few of the Cavaliers tore the breastwork away, and, with a wild and ringing cheer, they rushed upon the terror-smitten ranks, with bright swords gleaming in the sunlight. But a dozen or so of the enemy (principally officers) could still make a good fight, and it was no tame slaughter.

Challoner spurred toward Carlington with the ferocity of a wild beast, but an eddy in the fierce whirl kept them apart; and Gay just wheeled his

horse in time to save Ralph Rackett, who had immediately tackled the long sergeant, but was now at his mercy, with a broken sword. Down on the steel-cap of the sergeant, with the force of a bolt from heaven, descended Carlington's blade, and, though the skull-cap glanced the blow, Prim fell forward on his horse's neck, almost stupefied with its power, and spurred away with a broken head. At length, however, the proud colonel was compelled to withdraw, with such of his uninjured men as could be collected; but those of his band whom he left in the dingle were either dead or wounded.

The tradition, as well as history, of the terrible carnage of Deep Dingle, may still often be met with among the simple country people of this portion of Northumberland; and it is, no doubt, regarded as a Thermopylæ by them. Of the fifty-seven horsemen who entered the dingle in pursuit of Captain Carlington's band, only thirty-one escaped death, and only fourteen left the glen uninjured.

Bitter, indeed, must have been the mortification of Robert Challoner as he rode back to the Grange with his pitiful remnant of troopers. It is a portion of the tradition, that, for three days, he uttered no word to any human being; giving his orders in writing, and eating his meals in the solitude of his chamber.

The victorious Cavaliers, of whom but one of their number was hurt, and he but slightly, dared not remain in the vicinity, but continued their course to the westward.

CHAPTER VI.

FORWARD TO JOIN THE KING.

Boot, boot into the stirrup, lads,
And hand once more on rein;
Up, up into the saddle, lads,
Afield we ride again!
One cheer—one cheer for dame or dear!
No leisure now to sigh—
God bless them all! we have their prayers,
And they our hearts—"Good-by!"
Off, off we ride in reckless pride,
As gallant troopers may,
Who have old scores to settle, and
Long slashing swords to pay!—MOTHERWELL.

THERE were few bulletins in those days, but the news of the splendid little victory of Deep Dingle flashed over the country in one way or another, to the joy of the king-lovers and the mortification of his foes. It doubtless gladdened the heart of the anxious prince himself, where he was being surrounded by Cromwell at or near Worcester, in the south of England; and Carlington's name was high in the chosen circles.

The heroes, in the mean time, continued their route through the adjoining shires and towns where the sentiment for the king was strong and honest, picking up reinforcements wherever they paused, so that, at the end of the second day after the fight, Carlington found himself at the head of two hundred horsemen, brave as steel, and enthusiastically devoted

to their chief. Not daring to delay longer, for fear that Cromwell would attack the king before he could join him at Worcester, Carlington now set forth for the long ride of little less than one hundred and eighty miles.

It happened, also, that, on this very day, Colonel Chailoner, who had likewise, by this time, mustered a considerable force, in spite of his bloody disaster, set out to join Cromwell, with orders to make all speed.

The road was a long and weary one for the Cavaliers. For Cromwell held the direct line southward, and a circuitous route was compulsory with Carlington, who was in imminent danger of being cut off and surrounded by superior numbers. He therefore went more westerly from his course than he would otherwise have done. Judiciously choosing the shortest circuitous route, he moved to Harrogate, a small town in the West Riding of Yorkshire, thence through Halifax, Huddersfield and Oldham to Manchester—with the Roundhead garrison of which he had a slight skirmish—and thence gained Chester, crossing and recrossing the Welsh border to the old town of Shrewsbury. The distance from Shrewsbury to Worcester is scant fifty miles, by the westerly and shortest route; but so fatigued were their horses that a rest at the former place became an absolute necessity. In the mean time, Colonel Chailoner had united his forces with those of the Rebel General at Derby, and was pushing on with the main body to the attack. But the devoted Royalist did not despair. Twelve hours rest at Shrewsbury, and he

was again on the war-path, reaching Wolverhampton—thirty-five miles from Worcester—by daybreak of September 3, 1651.

News came up to him here that the hostile cohorts were advancing to the shock of battle, and he hesitated not to push forward with all possible speed. But upon reaching the little village of Stourport, barely twelve miles from Worcester, on the same day, he was confronted by a regiment of Rebel infantry, and at once prepared for battle.

The ground was an open plain. The Roundheads, under Colonel Challoner's immediate command, occupied a slight eminence, and formed in solid phalanx to await the cavalry charge. Their leader had a vein of keen shrewdness running through his hotspur madness. Well knowing the fierce temper of the Cavalier troopers, he was confident that they would attempt to ride down his infantry. His precautions were, therefore, well taken.

A ditch, skillfully concealed by masses of brushwood, with a thin layer of turf or sod, and further hidden by the nature of the ground, was between him and the foe, while the broad, flowing current of the Severn river securely protected his left. Thus intrenched, he coolly and confidently awaited the attack.

As for Carlington, with his unequal force, though he decided on a charge, it was not a decision rashly made. What other course was left him? The king might, at that moment, be engaged with the superior hosts of Cromwell. There was but one route to Worcester, and that was blocked by Challoner's veterans. They held the bridge by which he must

cross the Severn; the entire country around was hostile to the king's cause. What was he to do? He deliberated earnestly with himself, and reluctantly came to the conclusion, that, if he would reinforce his sovereign, he must run the tremendous risk of flinging his small but devoted band upon the full regiment of seasoned veterans that obstructed him. When I say that he came to this conclusion reluctantly, it must not be inferred that unsoldierly apprehension could for a moment find lodgment in the mind of our hero. But his heart was as tender as it was brave and manly. The responsibility which rested upon him was very great. It was not his own peril that caused him to hesitate—it was the pressure of the thought that the valuable lives under his control should not be hastily jeopardized—that he should hoard miserly, not wantonly waste, the noble men who intrusted themselves so confidently to his guidance. Even as it was, he would not accept the responsibility of an arbitrary leader. He stood in their midst and portrayed in just colors the danger they were about to encounter—the bloody issue which must attend even victory, let alone disorder; and it was not until, by enthusiastic acclamation, they signified their desire to be led upon the foe, that he suffered his scruples to be overcome, and made preparations for an immediate charge.

Nor was the heroic resolution of the little band of Cavaliers in the least degree modified upon their learning that Challoner's regiment had been reinforced by seventy-five cavalrymen under the lead of **Sergeant Prim.**

CHAPTER VII.

RALPH RACKETT'S LAST CAROL.

Sweep the strings with a steady hand,
Mournfully, sighingly,
Let the sorrow-note go over the land
Like an echo—softly, dyingly.—PROVENCAL AIR.

It was half-past two o'clock in the afternoon when the devoted band rode out of the streets of Stourport toward the intrenched camp of the Roundheads. As they rode along, the musical voice of Ralph Rackett could be heard above the rumble of steeds in a ringing martial ditty, and Carlington could not forbear a glance of admiration and respect at the utterly careless and jovial mien with which his reckless lieutenant was riding to the battle-field.

Hardly had they emerged from the wooded country to the open plain, at the further extremity of which the Rebel camp was situated, when a sharp musketry fire was opened upon them, but at such a distance as to have no effect. But, as they rode forward, a louder report apprised them that they also had artillery to encounter. The horse of one of the Cavaliers was plunged to the ground, almost disembowled by a round-shot, a moment after.

Silently forming for the charge, Carlington leading the center, Merton the right wing, and Rackett the left, the captain's plan was soon consummated.

He resolved that Rackett should charge in a straight line, with sixty horsemen, while he and Merton should make a diversion a little to the right, with the main body, and simultaneously charge at a different angle, the line of which would be partially concealed from the enemy for a considerable distance.

These movements were quickly made. He gave the signal for Rackett's advance, and was on the point of shouting forth the order for his own column to move, when the sight of a single horseman coming toward him at a wonderful pace from a little clump of cedars to his right, caused him to pause; for the steed was the white stallion, and his rider none other than the little page. Full of wonder at this strange sight—the page must have followed him all the way from Northumberland—he could scarcely believe his eyes, until the messenger stood close at his side—his noble charger bespattered with mud, and he pale, travel stained, and out of breath.

“Blessed Virgin, lad! what brings thee hither?” exclaimed the astonished Cavalier.

“Do—do not—charge—in this line!” gasped the page, through his broken breath.

“Why not?”

“The camp is protected by a covered ditch. It begins there, and ends there,” hurriedly continued the page, indicating with his extended finger the position and extent of the concealed trench.

“God help poor Rackett and the brave men he leads!” exclaimed the Cavalier, fervently; while the page spurred back to the clump of cedars from which he had emerged.

The line was hastily formed so as to avoid the treacherous ditch in the onset, the order given, and the troop rushed forward like a hurricane.

A murderous fire was opened upon them as they broke cover, and many a man went headlong from his saddle ere the line of the sunken trench was reached. But it was with disappointment and alarm that Colonel Challoner saw that the main body of the Cavaliers was to escape the trap set for them. Fully one half of Rackett's troop, however, had been lost or rendered useless by the pit, and a strong detachment of the Puritans was hurrying to destroy the remainder.

"Forward! forward!" shouted the clear tones of Carlington; and the next instant the head of his troop was dashed upon the serried line of Puritan pikes and muskets with the force of an avalanche.

But the hardy veterans of the Commonwealth stood firm. Although many were overthrown by the terrible collision, and others were stricken down by the swift sabers of their assailants, their line remained unbroken, and the rapid firing which they were enabled to maintain, at such close quarters, was poured into the horsemen with woeful effect. Again and again did the Cavaliers hurl themselves upon the masses of immovable infantry with desperate valor, and as often did the muzzles of the long line of muskets spout forth their missiles of destruction through the thinned and bleeding squadron of troopers, who, at length, exhausted and hopeless, were with difficulty gathered together and rallied for a final effort to force the Rebel lines.

"Once more! once more!" yelled Carlington, springing to the front with frantic vehemence.

He was bare-headed, and the sleeve of his doublet torn to shreds. A slight wound on the temple let a rill of blood down his pale cheek. He seemed an avenging angel, with his waving sword and desperate mien.

"Onward! onward!" he yelled once more; and the stern Puritans instinctively recoiled, as from the base of a tumbling mountain, as the devoted horsemen plunged at their breasts.

Two desperate blows, right and left, and Guy had broken the human wall. Twenty troopers rushed after him into the breach. Dismay seized the Rebels, and their ranks began to crumble at every point, while the victorious Cavaliers, their appetite for blood whetted by the losses they had sustained, showed little mercy to the fugitives. But Challoner flung a fresh company, which he had held in reserve, to oppose the rush, while, by great effort, the ranks which had been broken were restored behind the Cavaliers, who were thus completely hemmed in. To add to their helplessness, Sergeant Prim now rushed down upon them through the avenues of infantry, at the head of his seventy-five fresh horsemen. Though by no means romantic, the aspect of the hypocritical sergeant in battle was terrible. With his steel-cap pressed down tightly over his ears, his sleeves rolled up above his elbows, and a lively, matter-of-fact expression about the lips, he entered the strife of men with the business-like air of a butcher entering his stalls for the daily work of

slaughter; while, ever and anon, his loud nasal tone would ring out in Scriptural imprecations, such as:

“Down with the Philistines! Hew them from their stalks! Yea, crop them from their stiff and prideful stems! Upon them, children of the Lord! Trample the revilers! Let them be as worms beneath our heels! Bid the blasphemers howl in death! Roll them to the pit! Let the devil have his pets!”

This was the fanatic's mode of fighting. He knew not what it was to be chivalric, lofty or noble, when the game to be played for was human blood. To him the men he fought were not honest believers in an opposite creed; they were God-defiers, religion-defamers, virtue-tramplers—useless weeds in the gardens of the world. His firm belief was, that he was an especially appointed instrument of divine wrath. God had some dirty work to perform, and Prim was the servant selected for the task.

The Cavaliers, though surrounded on every side, and barely one-half of them in their saddles, were not dismayed. Animated by their heroic leader, they fought with the terrible valor of despair. Prim and his troopers were hurled back discomfited from their dauntless front.

Then there came a ray of hope—a ray that broadened into a steady beam.

Far beyond the hedge of infantry which encompassed them, there came the sound of another conflict, and the glad, reckless tones of Ralph Rackett's voice above the din. Carlington could not restrain a shout of joy.

“Do you hear? Do you hear?” he cried. “We

are saved! Forward! Upon them once more!" and again the worn and shattered squadron was hurled against the ranks which separated them from their brethren. It swayed up and down, wavered, then gave way.

And at this moment Rackett, with about twenty men, the sole remnant of the glittering and numerous troop he had led into action, fell upon the rear of the tired and bewildered infantry, who, to the number of several hundred, broke and fled in the wildest confusion.

Swinging his sword above his head, and reeling in his saddle like a drunken man, the incorrigible leader of the reënforcement was bawling fresh doggerel at the top of his lungs:

"Our steeds are all prancing,
Our sabers are out!
The Rebels are dancing
And bobbing about!
Charge! charge! Give them battle,
Cut home with a shout!
Turn their hymn to death-rattle,
Their ruin to rout!

"Then cut, cut home for your kindred!
And cut, cut home for the crown!
Our steeds are cheery, long-winded,
And they trample the Roundheads down."

"Ha! we meet again! Have at thee, psalm-singer," he shouted, making at Sergeant Prim, who was near at hand, exerting himself to allay the panic of the disordered and flying infantry.

"I will put thee beyond thy worldly blaspheming, thou devil's chosen!" quoth the grim sergeant, spurring to meet the Cavalier, with his huge brand swinging on high.

But the latter, by a dextrous movement, avoided the blow, and, before he could return it, a flying bullet killed the Rebel's horse, and they rolled to the plain together. Ere the Cavalier could make his victory complete, a dozen brawny Rebel troopers spurred in and rescued their chief.

The tide of the contest now was effectually turned in favor of the Cavaliers. Challoner made tremendous efforts to reorganize and rally the flying footmen, but without success. Rackett's sudden appearance on their rear had spread a consternation through their ranks, and their terror-excited fancies had multiplied his handful of troopers into a thousand men. The maddened Cavaliers pursued them over the field and slaughtered them like frightened sheep.

Infuriated—almost insane—at seeing his force thus melting away, the Rebel colonel covered their flight with the remnant of his veteran horsemen. He drew his pistol and aimed it at Rackett as the latter was charging him, shouting and singing in his wild, reckless way:

“The Rebels are running,
And yelping with shame,
'Tis jolly good gunning,
And plenty of game.
Charge! charge! Give them battle!
Cut home with a shout!
Turn their hymn to death-rattle,
Their ruin to rout!
“Then cut, cut home for your kindred!
And cut, cut home for the crown!
Our steeds are cheery, long-winded,
And they trample—”

The song was never completed; for, at this moment, the colonel's bullet struck the poor fellow in

the forehead, and he rolled from his saddle a dead man.

Carlington saw the dastard shot. A fierce fire leaped at his heart. He crushed the recollections of old friendship from his breast—he forgot that his foeman was Charlotte's brother—forgot every thing but vengeance, and, with a fierce shout, charged at the murderer. The Rebel troopers were scattered by the Cavaliers, and Carlington and Challoner soon confronted each other alone. The latter drew his remaining pistol and fired. The ball struck and shivered into fragments the uplifted sword of the Cavalier, when Challoner drew his blade and rushed upon him with a cry of triumph. But Guy evaded the stroke by a quick wheel of his charger; then, leaping from his saddle, he grasped the colonel by the throat, and they rolled to the earth together—the Rebel undermost. Stunned by the fall, he could not move. Carlington raised his dagger to plunge it in his foeman's breast, when a sharp cry close at hand caused him to pause, and his arm was seized.

"Spare him! spare him!" cried the page—for it was he.

But the anger of Carlington was aroused to the highest pitch.

"Away!" he shouted, shaking his arm free, and again raising his poniard.

The page knelt before him in an agony of emotion.

"Spare him, I beseech thee! Look! Spare him, if you value the owner of this!"

He thrust out his hand so that the diamond ring of his mistress glistened in the chieftain's eyes.

Carlington hesitated for an instant, and then released his antagonist.

"My reason returns," he said, turning to the page. "I thank thee. Thou hast saved me again—not my life, but my honor. A moment more, and I should have been a murderer. Colonel Challoner, you are at liberty. I can not take the life of a prostrate foe, even though his hand is red with the blood of my friend."

"You give me my life. I accept the boon," said Challoner, with his eyes on the ground. "I would reward your generosity by information which may be of value," he continued. "Your destination is Worcester, is it not? You ride to join your prince?"

"Yes."

"The battle of Worcester was fought this morning at break of day. General Cromwell was victorious, and now occupies the town. The Royalist army was utterly destroyed, and Charles Stuart is now a hunted fugitive—perhaps bereft of that which you have given me—life."

Having said this, the Rebel colonel remounted his horse and galloped off in the direction of his flying troopers.

Carlington was almost stunned at what he had heard.

"Can this be true?" he muttered.

"The tale is true," said the page, drawing his hat lower to hide the excessive paleness of his face.

Carlington's heart was full of pity for the youth. He was so young and delicate, so girl-like, that the

bloody scenes around him must be shocking in the last degree. Guy took him by the hand, and they moved forward till they stood beside Rackett's corpse.

"Kneel, my friend," said the Cavalier, "kneel with me, and pray for the soul of a gallant man!"

And they knelt and prayed.

Poor Ralph! few had been his own prayers in life—it was a strange event, that, of all the many dead that strewed that gory plain, his corpse should be the only one to receive a pious prayer for the welfare of its late tenant.

The battle had been most obstinate and sanguinary, and the victory was complete. But, although the Rebel loss exceeded that of the Royalists as much as their numbers had been overwhelmingly in the preponderance, the proportion of the Cavaliers who had been slain or overthrown, reduced their band to a mere handful of men.

Of the two hundred who had advanced to the attack, but thirty-six remained in the saddle!

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE OF WORCESTER.

On Worcester's dark and gory plains, well-a-day!
Charlie's Scotchmen died the death, and he
To Boscobel fled sorrowfully away,
And hid within an old oak-tree.—WELSH BALLAD.

Obedient to an invitation from the Scottish Presbyterians, or Covenanters, as they were distinctively called, that he would assume the throne of Scotland, Charles Stuart, afterward Charles II, of England, set sail from France, in which country he had long been an exile, and arrived in Scotland in the year 1649. Although the Scotch had refused to recognize the English Republic, the conditions upon which they offered the throne to Charles were so rigorous that his best friends had advised him not to endure such sacrifices for the vacant honor of kingship.

But the youthful prince, who, quite likely, entertained the dishonest intention of abrogating these conditions at the first practicable moment, had, nevertheless agreed to them. His proud nature was destined to receive many wounds among the Scotchmen. He was not suffered to land until he had signed the Covenant; and his landing was no sooner effected than he found himself beset on all sides by

the bigoted Covenanters, who sought to convert him to their own designs.

His position here was, in many respects, an uncomfortable one. The entire administration, both of church and state, was sedulously kept out of his hands by the Presbyterians, who, though they allowed him the title of king, hardly treated him with the respect of a superior.

So little regard was accorded to his feelings that, upon one occasion, they obliged him to pass under the gates of Aberdeen, over which was suspended one of the legs of his faithful friend and servant, the Marquis of Montrose, who had, a little before, been put to death for appearing in arms in his cause.

Under these circumstances, Charles secretly rejoiced at hearing that Cromwell was on his march to Scotland, with a powerful army, for the purpose of driving him from his uneasy throne. Of a gay and thoughtless disposition, and accustomed, as he had been for years, to an easy exile at the court of France, he was not sorrowful at a prospect which would compel him to leave the hard, rude Scotchmen, by whom he had been induced to "reign over them," as they termed his empty title; and, better still, he cherished a hope that the difficulties which were now gathering upon the stingy Covenanters, might enable him, eventually, to lead an army into England, for the purpose of overthrowing the Parliamentary power, and reëstablishing the Royalist rule over all the British isles.

The Scottish army, commanded by General Leslie, attacked Cromwell near Dunbar, and was utterly

defeated, with great loss; though the Puritan General was unable, at that time, to make himself master of the kingdom on account of a severe fit of sickness, which seized him shortly after the battle, and obliged him to return to England.

In the year 1651, Cromwell again invaded Scotland, with a strong force, and penetrated so far into the country as to get behind the army of the Covenanters. Charles, who was with the army, which consisted of fourteen thousand men, seeing the road to the English border thus opened to him, formed the bold design of marching into England, mistakenly presuming that all those who were discontented with the Commonwealth would eagerly flock to his standard. Many, it is true, of the more ultra Royalists hastened to join him, but the fear of Cromwell and other causes tended to prevent a general uprising in his favor.

The prince marched steadily forward, hoping at last to gather strength; but he arrived at Worcester with slight additions to his fourteen thousand Scots. Here he halted, and had a few days' rest after his wearisome march.

In the mean time, Cromwell, when he found that the king had slipped by him, left General Monk, his second in command, to take care of affairs in Scotland, and pursued Charles with all possible dispatch. Raising the militia of the several counties as he passed, he mustered an overpowering force, and swept down upon the king and his devoted Scots like a besom of destruction.

On the 3d of September, (on the 4th, according to some accounts,) the prince found himself completely

surrounded by the enemy. He, however, barricaded the entrance to the town, and made the best disposition of his troops, in which he was assisted by his friend and counselor, Lord Derby, who had shared his exile, and remained by him to the last.

At daybreak the attack commenced. Cromwell threw his forces in solid phalanx against the northern side of the city, while a detachment attacked it on the west. For several hours the little army of the prince, protected by the defenses they had raised, gallantly repulsed the Roundheads, who lost heavily. But the Royalists were without artillery, and, when the field-guns of Cromwell were brought to bear vigorously upon the town, the defenders gradually began to lose ground.

To add to their misfortunes, the houses in their immediate vicinity took fire from the bombardment, and the north wind, that was blowing at the time, almost blinded them with the heavy smoke which it drove into their faces. At this moment, Cromwell ordered the place to be carried by storm. The most desperate resistance was made by the army of the king, but the place was eventually carried. A scene of savage and indiscriminate slaughter ensued. "The very streets of the town," to quote the language of history, "were piled up with dead bodies." Few of the defenders escaped the massacre. Charles, himself, saved his life with much difficulty, and, accompanied by a troop of fifty or sixty gentlemen, rode toward the Staffordshire border, closely pursued by the Puritan soldiers.

The battle had lasted but a few hours; and, when

Cromwell saw that victory was securely in his grasp, he had detached a regiment, and dispatched it, under the command of Colonel Challoner, to cut off and capture Carlington's Cavaliers, of whose approach he had had due notice. The *finale* of this diversion, as we have seen, was the disastrous defeat and rout of Challoner near Stourport. And this result was of much more moment to the king than Charles himself was aware; for, had the defeat of Carlington been insured, the fugitive undoubtedly must have fallen into the hands of the master of Gresham Grange. As it was, the coast was quite clear to the confines of Staffordshire, in whose thickly-timbered hills and valleys the hunted monarch hoped to find concealment until a convenient opportunity for reaching the coast, and thence shipping for France, should occur.

Charles is reported to have said to Lord Derby, during his hasty flight, that he would prefer to reach the French coast a hopeless exile than to return to his gloomy throne in Scotland, if the latter were secured to him and his for eternity.

The fugitives had not ridden many miles to the northward before they heard, from the gossip of the country people, the news of the bloody fight at Stourport. The tears sprung into the monarch's eyes as the details of Carlington's dearly-bought victory reached his ears.

"Glorious Guy! brave Carlington!" he exclaimed, in husky tones, to his friends. "Oh, Derby! what bravery is wasted in my wretched cause! Do you think these gallant men, who fight and perish for their king, can have any idea what a vagabond he is?"

After many devious turnings to baffle pursuit, the prince reached the borders of Staffordshire, about twenty-six miles from Worcester, a little before sundown. Here, as it was evident that a most persistent search was still persevered in by Cromwell's troopers, Lord Derby advised that they should separate into several bands and scatter in different directions. This advice was so consistent with safety that it was instantly adopted. Lord Derby and two other gentlemen alone accompanied the prince, while the rest of the troop plunged into the country in various directions.

"By Jove, we have a splendid escort!" said the king, laughing at the disconsolate looks of his companions.

The hint was not thrown away on them, and they endeavored to appear more cheerful. But, certainly, the homeless, perilous position of the prince was one little calculated to inspire other feelings than those of despondency. Even the buoyant nature of the king presently succumbed beneath his anxiety; and the four horsemen rode forward beneath the deepening shadows of the twilight in silence and apprehension.

As they approached a heavy belt of timber, an exclamation of alarm from Derby caused the others to start from their reveries, when they perceived a troop of twenty or thirty horsemen riding rapidly toward them.

"I fear we are lost," said Derby, with frightful calmness.

Charles looked around him with a hopeless glance.

“Shall we turn back?” he inquired.

“It were madness,” was the reply.

“Draw then, gentlemen!” cried the prince, with sudden passion, at the same time unsheathing his sword. “They hunt me like a dog, but, by God’s mother, they shall see me perish like the king I am!”

Animated by this heroic example of their monarch, the swords of the three gentlemen leaped from their scabbards, and, fronting the advancing troopers, with their chargers drawn up breast to breast across the road, the four desperate men calmly awaited them.

Their apprehensions were destined to be happily disappointed.

“What is this? These are not Rebels!” cried Charles, joyfully. “Who can they be?”

“I am at a loss to know,” said the earl.

A more tattered, muddy, travel-sore set of Cavaliers than those who now halted at a respectful distance and bared their heads, it never before had been the fortune of Charles to witness. The leader, pale, and with a bandage around his head, leaped from his saddle, approached the prince, and, bending low, saluted the royal hand with respectful lips.

“By King Arthur’s beard, who art thou, man?” cried the monarch, wonderingly.

“One whom you knew and loved in happier days, my liege,” replied the Cavalier, with a sorrowful smile. “My name is Carlington.”

“Is it possible! Guy! my old friend! God bless thee! God bless thee!” cried the delighted monarch, springing to the ground, and embracing him warmly

A few hurried sentences of the Cavalier sufficed to clear away all doubts as to the affair at Stourport; and he, in turn, was made acquainted with the extent of the disaster to the king's arms at Worcester.

It was with a trembling lip that Carlington pointed to the handful of battle-worn Cavaliers, and said to the king :

"There are the victors of Stourport. They were two hundred this morning—this is the remnant!"

"I remember a brave man who should be among them now," said Charles; "one of Rupert's aids at Naseby. Let me see, his name—"

"Your majesty must mean Ralph Rackett, of Gawtrey Bridge. He perished this morning; and a braver spirit never took its flight."

The king turned away his head to hide his emotion.

"I remember the stories Sir Marmaduke Langdale used to tell about this Cavalier," he resumed. "The General spoke of him as a man who rode to battle with a song upon his lips—who jested at the approach of the Destroyer himself. *Requiescat in pace!* But who is that delicate youth in your troop—he of the matchless white steed?"

Carlington blushed, but made a brief explanation of the cause of the page's presence, and was obliged to mention the name of the Lady Charlotte.

"Quite a romance, I declare," said the prince. "And how is thy sweet lady-love? We saw her mother frequently when in France, and made a promise, I believe, that the fair daughter should be rescued from her Rebel kin, if success attended us

in Merry England. Heigh-ho! We made many promises then."

"May I inquire your majesty's present plans?" asked Carlington.

"Faith, you may ask, friend," said the other, "but his majesty will take care to preserve a discreet reticence upon that of which he is in profound ignorance."

"My liege," said the Cavalier, "if you will deign to trust yourself to my guidance, I think I can insure you safety, for the present, at least. I am ready to perish, if need be, in your majesty's cause, and the lives of all these brave men are freely, gladly at your command."

"I trust thee absolutely, Carlington," was the monarch's reply. "Let us know thy scheme, and act upon it."

"If we penetrate the woods in our front by a narrow bridle-path which leaves the road at the left hand," continued the Cavalier, "a brisk three hours' ride will bring us to the forest skirts of Boscobel. In this forest, as your majesty must be aware, is situated the old manor-house of the estate. For many years it was unoccupied, but is now inhabited by a family of simple wood-cutters by the name of Penderill. I will stake my life on their good faith. The father was an old retainer of our family, and an exemplary man. I know that the present family, which consists of the mother (who nursed me when an infant) and five stalwart sons, will be faithful to the trust, if your majesty casts yourself on their generosity. The ruined manor, in which they live,

is of difficult access for travelers, and it is also shunned by the country people, who have the notion that it is haunted. My proposition is, that your majesty will immediately set forth for the manor of Boscobel."

"What do you advise, Derby?" said Charles, turning toward his General.

After some hesitation, the earl fell in with the plan; and no time was lost in riding forward. The bridle-path was duly reached. The king, preceded by the Cavaliers under Carlington, entered the forest, which was almost of midnight darkness by this time. A long and silent ride in the gloom, now and then diversified by an open glade and glen, or a lonely woodman's clearing, brought them to a wide, cheerless heath, scantily illuminated by the stars. On the opposite side of this heath, or common, stretched the dark and unbroken forest of Boscobel. So dense and tangled was this belt of timber that it was with much difficulty Carlington could discover a continuation of the path, which had lost itself in the gorse and wild broom of the common. He found it at last, however, and, in a few moments, the royal cortége drew up in front of the ruined manor. It was in the heart of the deep forest, and approached by another road than that by which the cavalcade had entered the wood.

A bright light was beaming from the windows of the old house, and the loud summons of Carlington soon brought one of the inmates to the door, when the party entered.

Fine, strong men were the brothers Penderill.

They gave a rough, manly welcome to the fugitives; and old Goody Penderill, the mother, was overjoyed at meeting Carlington, whom she had not seen for many years.

There was some hesitation on the part of the prince as to whether or not he should make himself known to the peasants. He at length concluded to do so, however, and, when their amazement and awe at his august presence were somewhat overcome, he received such honest, heartfelt assurances that his concealment should be kept a secret, that he could but believe them sincere.

After a night of rest and recuperation, it was deemed advisable that the troop of Carlington should be disbanded, in order to make the hiding-place of the king less liable to remark. This was accordingly done. The weary veterans of the victory of Stourport scattered and returned to their homes by various directions—only Carlington, Lord Derby, Lady Charlotte's page, and the two gentlemen who had accompanied the king from Worcester, remaining at the Boscobel manor with the king.

CHAPTER IX.

BOSCOBEL FOREST.

" Ah me ! the deep, sweet groves, where all day long
Bubbleth the runnel, and the pleasant song
Of throstle, linnet, and lone wood-dove's moan,
Touch the pleased spirit tenderly. But groan,
Complaint, sad mutterings and eldritch cries,
Creep through the forest when the daylight dies."

THERE was something incomprehensible in the conduct of the silent page. He very seldom had any thing to say ; was rarely seen except out of doors, with his large hat slouched over his face ; and seemed to shun the society of all around him, though most courteous and respectful to each.

CARLINGTON was deeply interested in the lad, as well as grateful, and sought to find out something more of his history. But the reticence of the youth was not easily overcome. Although he never appeared any otherwise than pleased at the notice he attracted from the Cavalier, he would usually look so confused and unhappy if an allusion were made to himself that Guy could not have the heart to pursue his guest from idle curiosity.

AFTER they had been at the manor a week or more, however, the page was observed by Carlington to come out of the house in company with Goody Penderill, who seemed to have received some astounding intelligence, from her flurried demeanor, and a deep

blush suffused the face of the youth. And that evening, (to the further perplexity of Carlington,) Giles Penderill, the youngest of the family of wood-cutters, after a long conversation in private with his mother, started northward on white Boreas, and was gone for several days.

But, before he returned, the page was one day walking in the woods, when his steps were arrested by the low tones of approaching men, and he barely had time to slip behind a tree, before two Puritan horsemen rode into the opening and several others soon followed.

The page had no difficulty in recognizing the leader as Sergeant Prim; and, from the drift of their conversation, which he could plainly overhear, he was soon made aware that the fugitive prince was the object of their search. He slipped off in haste to the manor, and luckily finding Charles and his attendants there, apprised them of their danger.

A hasty consultation was had, when it was agreed that they should betake themselves to the forest separately, and remain for the day. This arrangement was slightly deviated from by the king permitting the page (at his urgent request) to accompany him into the forest. The latter had spent so much of his time of late in wandering about the grounds, that his familiarity therewith, it was thought, might materially aid the king in his concealment.

The wood-cutters were most sedulously engaged in their customary vocation of hewing timber, the busy spindle of old Goody Penderill was humming away as if it had never had a moment's pause, the

tortoise-shell tom-cat was basking composedly on the rug before the fire, the old Dutch clock was ticking away the time in its quiet, business-like fashion, and every thing was extremely natural and honest about the manor of Boscobel, an hour later, when Sergeant Prim, with his jackal pack at his heels, approached it from the interminable mazes of the forest, whence, at last, they had succeeded in picking their way.

"Well, let's wake the rats within," said the sergeant, thumping angrily at the door; for, being lost in a wood, with an empty stomach, is not conducive to a cheerful temper, even among the most pious. "Open the portals to the children of the Lord," bawled the soldier. "Open, I say!"

"Well, you needn't smash the door in, you ill-mannered hypocrite!" cried the widow, in a rage, at the same time appearing at the door. "What do you mean by thundering at my door in that way, you drunken vagabond! Oh, I'm not afraid of your savage looks, nor the iron pot you've got on your empty skull! What do you mean? Speak, or I'll treat you to a bath of dishwater, you knave!"

The hungry soldier winced beneath this tirade.

"Passionate and godless female!" he began, "in the name of the Lord God of hosts, Oliver Cromwell and the British Parliament, we are here to—"

"Who are you cursing in that outlandish way, you infernal vagabond? Take that, and that!" cried the apparently infuriated old lady, flinging her distaff at his head; and seizing a broom near by, she began to belabor the luckless sergeant till his steel-cap rung again.

"Take her off! Seize her!" he shouted, vainly endeavoring to escape the blows.

With difficulty restraining an explosion of decidedly un-Puritan-like merriment at their leader's ridiculous quandary, the soldiers here interfered, and the virago was at length secured.

"Ransack the house! Smash up every thing!" roared the enraged sergeant, rubbing his shoulders, revengefully.

"Nay! nay! friend!" said the elder wood-cutter, now advancing from the wood, followed by his tall brothers with their axes on their shoulders, "thou wouldst not commit an evil deed, to judge of thy most pious and good-natured aspect. Who art thou? What seek ye?"

"We are soldiers of the Commonwealth, and we seek the man Charles Stuart."

"We grant ye all due respect," said the wood-cutter; "but if it is the king, with whose presence report has honored our humble abode, we must let ye know that this is the first we ever heard of it."

The troopers, however, insisted on searching the premises, which they did, but without success.

In the mean time, the fugitives had made all haste to reach the innermost recesses of Boscobel forest, taking different directions, as we have intimated. Charles, accompanied by the page, had taken a westerly course—the wood seeming thicker and more impenetrable to horsemen in that direction. They could not have proceeded more than a few miles when they were startled by the sound of approaching steps. They listened intently, and knew them

for the tramp of steeds. It was evident that, if a concealment was to be effected, it must be done soon. To his great joy, the page, upon looking around, discovered that they had almost reached the great oak-tree, beneath which he had had his interview with Guy Carlington in the morning. The trunk of the oak was favorable to climbing, and the almost impenetrable foliage of the wide-spreading branches afforded an admirable concealment to any one who should seek a lodgment above. He immediately pointed out this tree to the king, who instantly perceived the advantage it offered, and they run toward it, for no time was to be lost. Charles clambered up without much trouble, and was soon out of sight from below. But there was no time for the page to follow, so he plunged forward, and thrust himself in some bushes, which crowded around the feet of some saplings, a few yards further on. Hardly were they secure in their hiding-places before Prim and his followers appeared, riding directly under the tree which was already growing celebrated, and at length coming to a pause, near the bushes that hid the little page.

But they wandered about the glade without success, and finally, (to the infinite relief of the fugitives, who heard every word with breathless anxiety,) proceeded onward into the deep forest. The hidiers waited a long time without moving; but the troopers did not return to their whereabouts, so the page ventured to issue from the friendly bushes, and with inward thanksgiving to Providence, the prince descended from the loyal branches of the tree, which was the site of the present Royal Oak of England.

CHAPTER XI.

A MORE LAUGHABLE ADVENTURE.

I met a fool i' the forest.—SHAKSPEARE.

NOT daring to return to the manor, as the Roundheads would be most likely to revisit that quarter again, the fugitive prince and his companion retired deeper into the forest until they came upon the rest of the royal suite, who had stumbled across each other during their wanderings, and were now reclining upon the sward, engaged in conjecturings as to the whereabouts of their sovereign.

The prince gave a lively account of his narrow escape, when the voices of the Cavaliers sunk much lower, for fear of again bringing the soldiers upon them. By the advice of the prudent Derby they were about to separate once more, and pursue different paths, when the tramp of an approaching steed caused them to shelter their heads as best they might, and the next moment Prim himself came riding through the little hollow in which they were concealed. He was all alone, however, and, as the party were tolerably well armed, they were not much frightened at his appearance. The heat of the day was still oppressive, and the Roundhead seemed to be perspiring freely beneath his helmet. At length, as his tired horse paused of his own account in the

cooling shade of a tree under which he was passing, and by where a grateful little spring gushed pleasantly from the turf, the temptation was too strong for the weary Puritan. Dismounting, after giving him a drink at the water, he relieved himself of his cumbersome skull-cap, and bathed his face and head in the bubbling fountain. He was then tempted to stretch his weary form upon the sward, and, very shortly, probably against his intention, fell fast asleep.

"How the hog snores!" whispered Charles, laughing.

"An idea! I have an idea!" exclaimed Morford, one of the suite.

"For mercy sake, let us know it," said the king; "brilliant conceptions are rare nowadays."

"Does not your majesty notice those heavy handcuffs and that bundle of strong thongs made fast to the bow of the Puritan's saddle? And can your majesty doubt the purpose for which they were intended?"

"'Sdeath!" said the merry monarch; "they were doubtless intended to adorn our own royal limbs."

"Why not turn the tables completely on the sacrilegious wretch? Let us spring upon him in his slumber, and immesh him in his own toils."

"By my life, thy thought is a sparkling one!" exclaimed Charles. "I vote in the affirmative."

So did the rest, and they proceeded to carry out the design.

In a few seconds their victim was completely bound, and awoke to find himself the center of a circle of scoffers.

The poor sergeant frowned savagely at being made the butt of a shower of witticisms, but he was unable to move hand or foot, and could only grin and bear it. He was not aware that one of his captors was the king, having never before seen him. And now it flashed upon him that the gay company by whom he was surrounded might not be found so incorruptible as the simple peasants. So he fumbled in his belt, as well as his fettered hands would permit, and produced the proclamation of reward for the king's head, which he proceeded to read aloud, much to the merriment of his auditors, but to none more so than to "the man Charles," to whom the proclamation of the Parliament chiefly related.

"Well, we know where the king hides; I propose that we produce him to the gallant sergeant," said he, merrily, turning to his companions.

"By all means!" cried the others.

"Release me immediately," said the delighted sergeant; "we will soon find my soldiers, when you can lead us to the hiding-place of the prince of revilers."

"Nay, we will not produce him till to-morrow," said Carlington.

"But consider, gentlemen, TWO THOUSAND AND TWO HUNDRED GUINEAS!"

"Nay, we will forego that pleasure till to-morrow. Come, friends, let us make the holy man comfortable for the night."

With that, they proceeded to make him fast to the trunk of the tree beneath which they were standing, strapping him bolt upright, with his back against the bark, so that he was unable to budge an inch.

Twilight was now falling, and the Cavaliers proceeded cautiously toward the manor, which they were not long in reaching.

It was with sincere gratitude that the hunted monarch heard, from the lips of the widow Penderill, of the manner in which the tempting bribe for his capture had been disregarded by the brothers. He made a solemn vow, which was, many years afterward, fulfilled, that their devotion should be suitably rewarded.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHAPTER OF SURPRISES.

CARLINGTON had treated the page with studied civility, for he was terribly jealous at last.

When he arose in the morning and sauntered out into the wood, he therefore strode on, immersed in his unhappy doubts, suspicions and hopes. It was an hour or more before he felt sufficiently composed to return to the manor, where the morning meal already awaited him. His companions were in the best of spirits after their sound sleep, and were exceedingly merry over the adventures of the day before. He alone was moody and silent.

Just then Guy Penderill galloped up to the open door on white Boreas. He was followed by a cartman, whose vehicle contained a huge traveling trunk and a lady's saddle, which were carried up stairs by the stout wood-cutter, and the page followed, accompanied by Goody Penderill.

At length Carlington was aroused from his gloomy reveries. A murmur of wonder from his companions, as the door which led to the stairway opened, caused him to turn. What did he see? Was it possible? His heart stood motionless with astonishment. He rubbed his eyes and pinched his arm dreamily.

"Charlotte! Charlotte!" he exclaimed.

He had no need to doubt his eyes. It was, indeed, the glorious lady of Gresham Grange.

"We know not whence or how you come among us, most lovely lady," said the king, bending low, and touching her snowy hand with his lips. "You seem to have descended from heaven to be our angel guide; but be assured that our hearts are grateful."

"I thank your majesty for this gallant reception," said the lady, "but must, nevertheless, disclaim any more celestial origin than the bleak hills of Northumberland. There is one, however, from whom I receive no welcome."

"Forgive me!" said Carlington. "I—I—" he stammered some words of welcome, and kept his eyes cast down.

The king perceived that they would be alone, and, after a few more gallantries, he sauntered out, with his companions, and the estranged lovers were left alone.

Carlington still looked down, and said nothing further.

"My page tells me thou art jealous, Guy?"

"He tells the truth," said the other, sadly.

"Dost thou think I would love my page as well as thee, Guy?"

"But he said so, he said so," exclaimed the Cavalier, pettishly. "I made him promise to prove the truth of his words; and, by heaven, he shall!"

"He will do so this very instant, Guy. Look up! He is here to answer for himself."

Carlington looked up. He perceived that a black moustache had suddenly grown upon the fair lip of

the lady. As he stared in amaze, she picked up the heavy slouched-hat of the page and placed it on her head, gathering back her curls with her other hand as she did so. The illusion was almost perfect.

"What!" exclaimed the astonished Cavalier; "you—you the page!"

"Most assuredly, Sir Jealous!" cried Charlotte, plucking the disguising moustache from her tempting lip.

Guy caught her in his arms.

"Can it be possible?"

"Yes; and I have a mind to punish you for your suspicions."

They were supremely happy, and the merry prince and the rest were happy likewise to see the lovers joined.

The lady tried to keep the secret of her identity with the page, but it leaked out, and only served to increase the admiration of the king.

"I' faith," he said, smiling merrily, "I wish that the ladies may play the page right often at my court, if I ever have one. But tell me, can you go with us? I this moment received intelligence from a faithful friend that the way is open to the coast, and a vessel awaiting me. Will you follow this sorry lover of yours to France? for, faith, he looks as if he had small objections to offer. Come, then. We will start at nightfall. Your baggage shall be sent forward in advance, and your ladyship can then show if you can sit the saddle as gayly as your page."

The lady consented to accompany them to France, where her mother would be overjoyed to meet her.

"And then—and then," cried Charles, "we shall have the gayest wedding that the gayest court in Christendom can produce."

Bidding adieu to their friends, the party set forth, intending to pay Sergeant Prim a visit by the way.

It was almost dark when they reached the glen in which they had left the sergeant in his unenviable position. They heard him groaning before they reached him, for he had managed to free himself of the gag.

"Good evening, sergeant!" was the greeting he received from the company.

"I charge ye to release me from these toils," said the prisoner, in a hollow voice.

"Nay, nay, we come but to redeem our pledge," said Morford.

"Ye bring the man Stuart to me? Which is he?"

"My name is Charles Stuart, said the king, advancing. "What wouldst thou have of him, friend?"

For a moment, the Puritan seemed bewildered at this intelligence; and the firm, modest tone of the prince, who called him "friend," was difficult to answer by one who had never mentioned the royal name but in scorn and reviling. But the Roundhead was not one to be long abashed.

"I seek him," said he, "as a disturber of the Commonwealth of our righteous Republic. His life is a forfeit to the State."

"You may say true," said the fugitive monarch, quietly, "but, at present, is not thy life a forfeit to

my will? Thou art my bound prisoner. What shall prevent me from putting thee to death?"

"I defy thee to do thy worst, thou wicked man!" said Prim, spunky to the last.

"I shall do so," said Charles, quietly dismounting and advancing toward the prisoner. "Thou seekest the life of Charles Stuart—this is his revenge." And, saying this, he drew his sword and cut the bonds of the Puritan, and also unclasped the heavy manacles that bound his wrists. "Puritan, thou art free! Here is thy sword, here is thy helmet, here is thy steed. Behold, here is my bosom bared to thee! Strike home!"

Mechanically the trooper had grasped his sword, his helmet, and his bridle-rein, and he now stood staring at the magnanimous king in a kind of mental stupor. In most of his convictions he was an honest man—a fanatic, but a fervent believer. But the hard, worldly shell of his nature was broken in at last. A moment he stood bewildered, lost; he then let his weapon fall to the ground, dropped upon his knees at the monarch's feet, and burst into tears.

Charles' heart was touched. He took the humbled man by the hand and gently raised him.

"I hope thou wilt think more charitably of thy sovereign henceforth," said he, kindly; "or call me plain Charles Stuart, if thou wilt. I give thee credit for being an honest man. But remember this, friend, whatever thou believest of thy free will, permit thy neighbor to believe as *he* wills. Be a Puritan—be a Republican, an' thou wilt—but let me—since I also *believe*—let me be a king. Farewell!"

The king remounted his horse, and his attendants followed him slowly out of the forest, deeply impressed with the strange scene they had witnessed, and leaving the silent trooper alone in the dusky glen, with the solemn shadows of night falling around them.

After many narrow escapes and severe hardships, the whole party managed to reach France, where the Lady Charlotte and Guy Carlington were married. They returned to England at the Restoration, and enjoyed many years of happy existence.

THE END.

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